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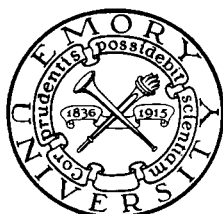


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SKIRMISHING.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. DATUR HORA QUIETI	1
II. SWALLOWING THE LEEK	10
III. DODGE	19
IV. CHURCH-GOING AND HOP-PICKING	29
V. NO MAN OR WOMAN CAN LIVE LONGER AT PEACE THAN NEIGHBOURS WILL LET THEM	45
VI. THE LOST SHEEP	58
VII. THE PYROLA	68
VIII. CHIAROSCURO	74
IX. "THE LITTLE RIFT"	85
X. ONE TALE IS GOOD TILL ANOTHER'S TOLD	92
XI. WOE TO THE CONQUERED	103
XII. TU QUOQUE	112
XIII. WHY?	119
XIV. DANGER-FLAG	128
XV. THE SHADOW OF LOVE	138
XVI. A WORD BEFORE IS WORTH TWO AFTER	146
XVII. LOVE'S CURSE.....	154
XVIII. THE TWO SIDES OF THE SHIELD	163
XIX. ONE EYE-WITNESS IS BETTER THAN TEN HEARSAYS	171
XX. ILL NEWS TRAVELS APACE	185
XXI. THE WOUND IS GREAT, BECAUSE IT IS SO SMALL	196
XXII. LE REVENANT.....	207
XXIII. NEW LIGHTS	215
XXIV. "SCATTERED FOAM, THAT'S HER HISTORY"	222
XXV. GONE.....	233

POST SCRIPTUM:—

"QUID DATUR À DIVIS FELICI OPTATIUS HORA?" 24

SKIRMISHING.

CHAPTER I.

DATUR HORA QUIETI.

It was the evening of the last Sunday in August, until after Whitsunday of the next year, there would be no more six o'clock services in the largest room of the white house on the top of the common.

The curate and the rector's eldest daughter had walked back to the rectory together, over the fields and through the hop gardens; Maud Greatorex had a small bunch of early hops in her hand. Walter Escott, hot and wearied as he was by the duties of the day, lingered on the door-step, his eyes fixed on the home view before him. Not much wonder that he did pause, to enjoy the sight of the closing day.

Low on the western sky was a space of luminous light, above which hovered little fleecy clouds with edges of purest gold colour; and higher still, was that tint which is not green nor yet blue—clearer, more transparent than any hue we can name, and peering through it a star, the first harbinger of night. The light was all behind the church and its broad old

yews; the church was of a uniform ashy grey, the trees almost black. Caractus, the roan pony, stood in a ruminating attitude in the glebe meadow, surrounded by a host of poultry intent on going to roost. A knot of sheep were huddled together under the poplar-trees, the quivering of the restless leaves quite visible against the radiant sky; occasionally there was a distant dog's bark, or a few notes from some garrulous bird, before it decided to put its head under its wing: no other sounds.

"You look very tired, Walter," said Maud.

He turned his eyes from the sky and the church to her face. "Only sufficiently so to double the enjoyment of this blessed hour of quiet," he answered. The face he was looking at, suited the hour and the scene: it was full of a tranquil joy; the black eyes were kind and grave, like those of a child; the forehead, up to that instant unruffled by one painful thought, as smooth as when she was five years old; the lips as even in line and colour—not the slightest disturbance visible in any feature. It is the last time the curate will see it thus: life is about to write its experiences on the fair surface.

"Shall we walk to the summer-house?" asked the curate, on hearing a hubbub of boys' and girls' voices; his betrothed's brothers and sisters were coming in at the gate. Escott moved on without waiting for an assent, so well used was he to find Maud ready to follow wherever he led. They were soon out of reach of the noisy merry rogues, and pacing the neatly gravelled walk leading to what was considered as Maud's particular retreat.

"Did you observe that both Eben Hart and Jemima White were at evening service?" was how Maud broke the silence of their walk. Escott nodded. "I went to see Jemima yesterday," continued the young lady "It is not true that she is untidy, one of the accusations, you know, which old Hart brings against her. She keeps her father's cottage as clean and nice as possible, and as for herself, she was a picture of neatness—her hair shone like glass. I have been so indignant at the cool way in which Eben gave her up; I could not help saying, I hoped she would show a proper womanly pride, and never speak to him again."

"And what did Jemima say?" asked the curate, with a smile in his eyes.

"Oh! she began to defend him directly, and laid all the blame on his father, declaring roundly that neither she nor any one else ought to blame Eben; he was only obeying his parents. I said, 'I do believe, Jemima, you would have him now if he asked you,' and she answered, 'I am afraid I would, miss. I never could care about another man; we have walked together, Eben and me, even since I was twelve years old.'"

"I was sure of it," exclaimed the curate; "a true woman, this Miss White. And you were really surprised, Maud, that you could not make Jemima take part against the man she loves?"

Maud scarcely heard what Escott said, at least did not at that moment seize his meaning; it was only the voice that spoke she heard, only the smile of the speaker that she saw. Some men have advan-

tages far beyond mere regularity of feature, and Escott was one of these too favoured children of nature. Maud felt his voice and smile like a "silent caress," and her young heart grew too big for her bosom, as she stood beneath his gaze. She turned away with a wish to say something, and could find nothing better to remark than, "Ah! there vanishes the sun for this day."

Escott murmured to himself,—“The sun grew broader towards his death, and fell.”

The aptness of the image struck Maud, and not recognizing the quotation, she thought to herself, as indeed she did a hundred times between every morning and evening of the week, "How clever he is!"

Presently he said, "Maud, I have been thinking lately of proposing to your father to let me exchange duties for a couple of months with some overworked London curate: there is a positive injustice in one man's enjoying, summer after summer, such sweet fresh air, comparative *no* work, and another slaving day and night in dark pestiferous alleys, exposed to every sort of bodily and mental infection. I should like to send some half-poisoned creature here, and while I was trying my hand at his task, to picture him to myself, lying on the cool grass under a tree, drinking in the healthy air, learning to distinguish between the whistle of the blackbird and the song of the thrush; taking his Sunday evening rest, with his eyes fixed on such a sky as this, watching the stars as they twinkle into sight."

"Ah yes! but you, Walter,——"

"I," he went on, quickly, "I should learn to be more grateful for the blessings of my lot."

Maud, as she listened, felt as though every syllable he said was a little painful blow on her heart—she had literally a physical sensation of pain. How easily he talked of going away, and without one allusion to any unwillingness to leave *her*; and she, why, she knew that, of her own free-will, she could never decide on a day's absence from him. She had it on her lips to say, "If you cared for me as I care for you, I am sure you would not want to go to London or anywhere else, or be thinking of any one's happiness but mine." She did not utter her thought, however, for when a first doubt of a friend presents itself to an untried mind, it meets with intuitive opposition—it is driven away with the contempt due to a slanderer.

Escott, in the meantime, yielding to the influence of the hour, had fallen into a pleasant reverie, without the remotest idea of the effect of his last speech—more the expression of a momentary feeling than of any serious intention. Both were startled out of their meditations by the sound close by of some one whistling a popular polka, and directly afterwards a boy, dressed something in the fashion of a German student on a pedestrian expedition, *i.e.*, in a brown holland blouse, with a black leather belt round his waist, a smart little cap on one side of his head, swinging a light cane, stepped jauntily along the sunken road which ran by the rectory grounds.

"It is young Brown," said Maud. The curate's face darkened.

As the lad came opposite to where the young lady was standing, he ceased his whistle, and lifted his cap, with a half mock reverential gesture, showing as he did so a profusion of light, close-curling hair. Maud bowed slightly, but Escott turned his back. In another instant the obnoxious whistle was again ringing through the air.

"What a misfortune for us and the parish that such people as these Browns should have taken the Hatch," sighed Escott.

"They do help the poor, though," said Maud.

"Yes, they give away money and set a bad example in pretty equal proportions. That boy undoes in the week all the good the girls get on Sundays. I detest to go up to the Common, he is for ever there, talking and joking with the Harts, and Whites, and Tyles; they are ten times as light-headed as they were before he came here. He is on his way now to Coldblows, and the whole evening will be spent in idle talk and merriment, if not worse. Larry Earl has left off coming to read with me on Sundays, and I have no hesitation in laying the blame on that young vagabond."

"Perhaps," said Maud, "if the boy had some companions of his own rank, he would behave better. Mademoiselle says that when she has met him at the Earls, though he is full of his nonsense, he is never rude or ungentlemanly."

"I am sorry your governess knows anything of him. I trust he will never be allowed to make his way into the rectory." Here the walk and the conversation ended.

The village of Eden, of which Maud's father, Mr. Greatorrex, is the rector, with its pleasant pastures, its hop-gardens, its bosky ravines, its hill-sides clothed with hanging woods, its quiet green lanes, and its neat scattered cottages, lies snugly folded away among "long-backed downs." No high road to anywhere passes through it, no railway-station makes it easy of access. There is in it only one house of any pretension to gentility besides the rectory, viz., the Hatch, which, with its bright green outside shutters and deep grey roof, resembles many of the small châteaux in the environs of French provincial towns. But the Hatch had, till within very lately, been empty for years; its owners had gone abroad, leaving it furnished, in the hope of its being taken as summer quarters. Now as the Greatorrexes' nearest neighbours lived three miles off, it may be easily understood how lonely they had been since the departure of the family from the Hatch, and how excited they became—from the eldest to the youngest—when it was known that the Hatch had at last found a tenant.

Master Charlie Greatorrex, some three months before this particular August evening, returning from an expedition with his ferret, had been startled by the sight of the opened windows of the "house to let," and of a one-horse fly standing at the gate. Charlie had recognized the driver as one of the men from the inn where Mr. Greatorrex put up his carriage when he went to Z——, the nearest market town to Eden; so Charlie had stopped and asked the driver whom he had brought over.

The driver did not know the name—some people come over with Mr. Matthews to look at the house; but Charlie seeing a hand-book lying on one of the carriage seats, with the daring of a young heir-apparent—Charlie had no equal in Eden—sprang into the fly and opened the book. Alas! there was no name, only the initial F B. Little as it was, it was great news for the rectory lunch-table.

By dinner-time the rector knew that the Hatch was let, positively let to a Mrs. Brown, who had one son. Mrs. Brown had taken the house for a year, and was coming to it immediately.

Then had followed suppositions and conjectures innumerable. Was she a widow? Probably; though she might, to be sure, be the wife of an officer on foreign service, or of some one in India, a civil servant, or indigo-planter. It would have been more satisfactory had there been a Mr. Brown instead of a Master Brown; but there being no visible husband did not necessarily prove the lady to be a widow. At any rate, she must be tolerably well off to take the Hatch: no one could live there without four or five servants. Well, it was a blessing the house was taken. If her mother would have preferred that Mrs. Brown had had a husband instead of a son, Maud could have wished the boy had been a girl. On the whole, however, the rectory was in high spirits. One must have lived in such a place as Eden to understand the value of a house being occupied.

The first Sunday after the arrival of Mrs. Brown at the Hatch, morning service was fully attended, which is only the case in country parishes on solemn

occasions. The choir—tenor, counter, and bass—managed miraculously to have shaved in time, and were in their seats in the chancel.

No strangers came to hear them either in the morning or afternoon; the disappointment was as good as a sermon against making the effort of shaving early to come to church, merely to gratify curiosity and vanity. Neither that Sunday nor ensuing Sundays did the tenants of the Hatch appear in church.

The Greatorexes had hesitated to call on them; primo, because they had apparently no more religion than stocks or stones, though of their charity there could be no doubt; secundo, because the rector and his lady were not sure of the Browns' position in life—indeed every one was puzzled how and where to class them. Instead of the regular quota of cook, housemaid, footman, and gardener, hitherto considered the smallest establishment possible at the Hatch, the strangers had but one servant of all work, or *for* all work, and that servant a man and a foreigner, in fact a grey-haired German. Then Master Brown had got acquainted with all the folks on the Common, the least respectable part of the parish, and, as the curate had said, was almost every evening to be met in the green lanes thereabouts, walking with half-a-dozen girls, keeping them in fits of laughter. It was through these acquaintances the boy heard of any case of distress, and his mother's hand was as open as the day. No denying that. It is not in the country as it is in town, where you are supremely indifferent to your next-door neighbours,

so that they neither practise the cornet-à-piston nor manufacture fireworks. But if in the country there is a greater spirit of inquiry, there is more neighbourly kindness also. The question of calling at the Hatch was at the end of three months still in an unsettled state; there was indeed a large party in favour of doing so, composed of the junior members of the family, headed by grandmamma, and probably it might have been already decided in the affirmative but for Walter Escott's taciturn opposition. Had he only joined in the discussions, his power would have been a balanced one; but that silence, which argued nothing, yet implied so much, made the scale of the objectors kick the beam.



CHAPTER II.

SWALLOWING THE LEEK.

WHEN Escott and Maud walked through the conservatory into the drawing-room, they heard grandmamma's strong clear voice saying,—“Go and see them? to be sure you ought. It should have been done long ago: better late than never; they are your parishioners—they're not mad—they won't bite you.”

These obnoxious Browns were again under discussion. That's one of the disadvantages of the country. The allowable nine days for any topic is multiplied by nine.

“I am afraid, mother,” replied Mrs. Greatorax,

"if we do, of its ending in something like our experiment with the Dunstans."

"But, grandmamma," . . . began Maud, who, believing that her future husband must always be right, did not care that her family should run counter to his opinion.

"Hush, Maud," interrupted grandmamma, "you are a partisan, therefore whatever you say on this point goes for nothing. After all, you know nothing more, do you, against these Browns except that they haven't an establishment of smart servants as your father has, but only a round-shouldered, shabby-looking old German, for all their domesticity? and when you have added that they are not Sabbatical, you have emptied your bag, I believe."

(Within a parenthesis be it explained, that the lady speaking was the widow of a Monsieur de l'Escrimière, and that her English mother had also married a Frenchman, an emigrant of '92. "Madame de l'Escrimière," or, as she chose now to be called, Mrs. Lescrimière, though able to speak English fluently, would occasionally use a French word or idiom, when either best expressed her meaning. She was an oppositionist by nature, and education had made her an abhorrer of all arbitrary social distinctions—all despotic authority, of whatever species.)

Mrs. Lescrimière went on, "They have come from the Continent, and we know such folks can't have the respectability and gentility of pure, untravelled English—aware of my own imperfections in that line, I am paid to be indulgent, and as for

their not having come to church yet, they mayn't be the less good Christians for that."

Escott was about to speak—

"Oh! my dear curate," she said, waving her hand, "I know what you are going to say, perfectly well. I don't deny your reasons, only allow that I am reasonable also when I beg you to remember that there were Christians—excellent, the best of Christians—before they had any church to go to. Ah! you don't forget, I am sure, that the Jews and Pagans persecuted and despised them for not going to *their* temples. Now don't all of you look as though I deserved to be packed up between two faggots, but listen to a story!" Mrs. Lescrimière generally had a story pat for every subject. "When my father and mother married, or rather when my father ran away with my mother to Gretna Green (they were married afterwards also by a priest), they found a pretty cottage among the hills in Cumberland, and thought it would be a fine quiet haven to wait in until the storm about their elopement should have blown over. Ah! my father did not go to the village church, for an essential reason: he had been baptized and brought up as a Catholic—a Roman Catholic, as it is the fashion to say—and of course he would have deemed it a sin to pray in a Protestant church. Protestants return the compliment to the Roman Catholic chapels; besides, it was not much the habit among Frenchmen of that epoch to go to any place of worship. My mother either lacked courage to face an inquisitive rural congregation by herself, or preferred doing as her husband did—girls

in love have a logic of their own: however that might be, they did not either of them go to church. I give you my word of honour my parents were really estimable persons—full of good works, Mr. Escott—descendants in right line of the good Samaritan. Well, first there was a whisper in the Cumberland parish, which grew and grew in strength till it might have been heard a league round. The French couple were Jews, Turks, Atheists; they burned the Bible every Sunday; then their windows were broken, and on their drawing-room carpet hopped frogs, and I might never have been here to tell this story but for the rector of the village and his amiable wife, afterwards my godmother. Up to that time, they had not called on the Johnny Crapauds, just because of their not having made their appearance at church; but when this sort of persecution began, they bravely came to the cottage and invited my father and mother to the parsonage, and the whispers, and the hubbub, and the plague of frogs ceased. And so you see that the mere fact of not going to the parish church, so long at least as one keeps one's feet from straying into opposition chapels" (this was a hit at the curate), "does not of necessity make Mrs. Brown a phenomenon of wickedness."

Escott now came out of his corner to say,—“Indifference to small neglects of duty leads to very serious errors; and voluntarily to choose for one's acquaintance those of whose habits we do not approve, is a willing exposure of ourselves to temptation. Besides, what an example to the parish, to see the

rector and his family calling on people who fly in the face of our admonitions as to the necessity of coming to church!"

"How can you tell that it may not be the means of bringing Mrs. Brown and her young pickle into the right way? People in health don't require the doctor's care, do they?" asked Mrs. Lescrimière. "And as for temptation, my dear sir, if you don't go to it, it comes to you; perch yourself on the top of the Vendôme column, or hide in the caves of Edom, temptation will find you out. You must go out of this world to avoid it, if you do even then, my dear friend."

Escott moved his shoulders, a petulant movement, such as one remarks in spoiled children. This old lady was a great trial to him, and a trial for which he was not at all thankful; there was something about her which he qualified to himself as "disorder." She hated routine, never would receive any notion on authority, and would insist on discussing its reasonableness, its credibility. She disturbed Escott in all the ideas and habits in which he had been brought up; she did not in the least amuse him as she did the equally pious but more tolerant Mr. Greatorex; she was, besides, always so possessed by her subject, that she seldom perceived she was worrying or displeasing any of her hearers by her insistence.

"Such a theory as yours, grandmamma——" began Mr. Greatorex, who as yet had taken no part in the discussion.

"Never mind theories," broke in the wilful old lady, "let's stick to practice, and I protest Mrs. Brown's practice is good. She is far from rich, that

is clear; yet wherever there's sickness or the want of a shilling or two, I find Mrs. Brown's meat or Mrs. Brown's money. She lives a life that would do honour to a nun, young and handsome as she is; and yet we send her to Coventry as though she were a confessed criminal."

"It is exactly because she chooses to live so differently from other people that one hesitates whether to visit her or not," said Mrs. Greatorex. "Why does she seek such retirement? no letters even!"

"Go and ask her why; that will be the shortest way of coming at a reason," replied Mrs. Lescrimière, laughing; then she added, "I suppose I may as well confess that my word is at stake. My dear Louisa, I have promised a visit to Mrs. Brown, and being in the scrape myself, I thought you might as well be my companion; and so I told the boy you would do yourself the pleasure of calling on his mother."

At this announcement Escott turned sharply on his heel, and went into the conservatory, Maud's eyes fixed themselves on the carpet, Mrs. Greatorex reddened and looked at her husband. There was such an exuberance of hearty kind feelings in Mrs. Lescrimière, such a strength of desire to help every sort of suffering, such a tendency to take the part of the weak against the strong (she always believed the weaker of the two to be in the right); and once enlisted in favour of any one or anything, such an incapability of seeing the other side of the question, that this was by no means the first time that, through taking the initiative, she had entangled her daughter in a delicate dilemma. It would take pages to describe

Mrs. Lescrimière's admirable mistakes ; the wonder to her friends was, that after her sad experiences, she should be still so full of life and hope, and what Escott denominated, speculative optimism. Common-place people called her ways of thinking and acting, affectation or insanity ; wiser heads said, that the quickness of her circulation was at the root of it all.

The measure of difference of views between mother and daughter was that of a whole century. While Mrs. Lescrimière had been roughing it through the world with a husband whose political opinions forced him to change his place of residence pretty frequently, Louisa, now Mrs. Greatorex, was being educated in a provincial town in England by a widowed aunt, on the walls of whose sitting-room hung engravings of George the Third, Queen Charlotte, and William Pitt ; educated, that is, under the shadow of the unfolded standard of reverence for the divine right of kings, of social etiquettes, and of old systems. Reunited to her mother, Louisa's notions had been gradually somewhat modified, she had even learned that some of her gods were false gods, she had moments when she was as ready as her mother to be indignant over the good old times ; but then it was her heart, not her head, that was influenced ;—no, under the surface of her charming gentleness and real simplicity, lurked the ineradicable Tory prejudices of her youth. She yielded to her mother from love, but her sympathies were with her intended son-in-law, a great stickler for authority in all things *quand même*.

The dead silence of their elders made Carry, and Charlie, and Willie, who had been busily talking over

the pictures in the large Bible, cease their chatter, and begin to watch what was going on. Mr. Greatorex was the one who relieved Mrs. Lescrimière's embarrassment, for embarrassed she was, in spite of herself; he said, "You have cut the Gordian knot, grand-mamma—bravely come to the rescue of our curiosity; we could not have gone on much longer wondering about these neighbours of ours. Whatever comes of it, we can now lay all the blame on you. I shall have interesting news for our next clerical meeting."

"I thought you clericals never talked of anything but Greek," here put in Master Charlie.

The Swiss governess frowned severely on the young gentleman.

"But how did you come to speak to young Brown, mother?" asked Mrs. Greatorex.

"I met the boy yesterday at Mrs. Green's, my dear; he had been helping the poor old body to carry her pail of water, and he was sitting chatting with her when I went in. I could not pretend not to see him, and once having spoken, the conversation went on of itself. We walked down the hill together. I liked his keen relish of the bright sunshine, the flowers, the birds. I liked the way he avoided all hints or allusions to himself or us; not a word as to its being dull here;—that was a proof of self-respect, wasn't it?" All the good lady's usual brightness of eye and briskness of tone was merged in anxiety to mollify her auditors.

Mr. Greatorex again took her part: he liked her smiles and her little brusquerie. "Well, well, grand-mamma, we'll go and fulfil your promise; when we

have seen Mrs. Brown, and talked with her, we shall be able to judge with something of knowledge." Escott left the field to the conqueror.

The summer twilight was over and night had arrived when the curate walked out of the rectory porch: the stars glittered through the branches of the great cedar that stood to the right of the lawn, and made it look like a child's gigantic Christmas tree, hung with variegated crystal drops. Outside the gate, nothing of earth checked his view of heaven's great spangled arch. The pure light of the gleaming galaxy streamed into his soul, and showed him how puerile the causes which had chafed his spirit. The stars called to him in the same voice in which they had called to the patriarchs and shepherds of ages past; they told him as they had told those of old, "To sing praises unto the Lord who sitteth in the heavens over all from the beginning."

"Can any one with the power of thought be abroad on such a night in the quiet fields full of sheep, the valleys thick with corn so that they laugh and sing, and not have awakened within him a prophetic knowledge of God?" Escott was passing the Hatch as he thus soliloquized. Out from the widely-opened windows floated a rich volume of melody. A voice, apparently a woman's contralto, sung with merry vigour, "*Il segreto per esser felice.*" Escott stopped to listen, for the music and singing were exquisite; yet impossible to have chanced on anything more jarring with the tone to which his meditations were pitched than the words of that song, familiar to him as to most people.

“Unfortunate beings!” said the curate to himself, “who, informed by an immortal soul, can fall so low as to take such joys as the secret of happiness!” Nevertheless, the strain held him entranced, and he had a painful double consciousness, as if something in himself answered to the dictum of the song. And where are we to find the person who has not often experienced a sudden inner reaction, from the noble to the mean? where is the one who has never revolted against himself in acknowledging that tendency of his mind to gravitate towards low desires, as his feet to the earth?



CHAPTER III.

DODGE.

MRS. GREATOREX believed that “those Browns” would be highly gratified by a call from the rectory. She felt in her heart that it was a condescension on her part which ought to give pleasure. All over the civilized world is there not an anxiety to be visited by the right people; that is, by our superiors? Not by angels or archangels, understand, but by rank and fashion. And what a deal of trouble we take to accomplish this end! We should be pretty sure of entering the gates of heaven, if we practised the same humility, self-control, and self-sacrifice we do to get within the park gates of the greatest man within our reach. Not that this bastard sort of hero-worship makes us unnatural in our affections or distorts us

into monsters ; its worst effect in general being the making us poor folks forget, not our humble friends, but to cut our coat according to our cloth.

Now, Mrs. Greatorex, a lady whose father belonged to one of those fine old French families designated *Les grands chevaux de Lorraine*, the wife of a reverend gentleman of family and fortune, imagined, and as the world goes, had a right to imagine, she was about to confer a signal favour on a Mrs. Brown, who apparently had neither fortune nor friends.

"I think," mused Mrs. Greatorex, "that she is probably a person who will be gratified if I go rather smart."

It might be for that reason Mrs. Greatorex put on her newest bonnet and mantle, or it might be that she was unconsciously influenced by having heard, or read of, or felt by experience, the effect produced by fine feathers. As she walked along the pretty winding road across the Lea, leaning on her husband's arm, their younger children romping round them, making the "air vocal" with their merry voices, the pleasant day and her own pleasant sensations developed in the bosom of the rector's wife a general good-will, extending to the unknown neighbour she was going to visit.

"If we find this Mrs. Brown presentable," said Mrs. Greatorex, "we might ask Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale to meet her at our house. Mrs. Lonsdale likes strangers, and she does not see many people herself."

Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale were from Australia ; comparatively new arrivals in the neighbourhood, and just beginning in right of a good fortune to slip into county society.

At much about the same moment Mrs. Greatorex was projecting to give Mrs. Brown a chance of more new acquaintances, Mrs. Brown was lamenting to Hans, in German, the probability of the visit, the menace of which George had brought her from Mrs. Lescririère.

Hans, a feather brush in hand, was gravely marching about the room removing the dust from tables and chairs; naturally, Hans being single-handed in the house, had to manage to keep it clean, when and how he could. He showed that he heard what his mistress was saying, by an occasional sympathizing smack of his protruded lips, or the holding of his brush interjectionally aloft.

“All our quiet gone, and I thought myself so sure of being avoided if I did not go to church!” added Mrs. Brown with a sigh.

Hans replied by putting up his shoulders and drawing down his head between them; then with a “chut,” pointed his brush towards the window, and hurried to open the door to the rector and his wife. The children were left on the lawn.

The ladies made a nice contrast. Mrs. Greatorex, small, slight, with almost a girlish figure, a pretty brunette, with bright dark eyes, a light step (French in appearance in spite of her English education), and the manner of one accustomed to the first place.

Mrs. Brown, tall, large, calm, rather indolent looking, beautiful to a degree that startled her visitors;—great beauty is a rare sight. As one freemason discovers a brother by signs unknown to the uninitiated, so does one woman instantly perceive when another

belongs by right to the same class as herself. Mrs. Greatorrex at once understood that Mrs. Brown was her equal, and further, she felt satisfied, as immediately, of her respectability; how or why she could not have demonstrated any more than she could have given her reasons for detecting under downcast eyelids and faultless dress, the woman *pas comme il faut*. Habits of life and thought write on the human being, as the sun leaves its trace on everything it touches—it fades some and brightens others; our daily habits do the same for our appearance.

The impression Mrs. Brown received was agreeable and equally instantaneous; while the usual phrases with which strangers begin to make acquaintance with one another were being interchanged, she was thinking “how well those two people suit each other, how her liveliness must relieve his soberness.”

Mrs. Greatorrex, though, was less talkative than was her wont; she was pre-occupied by a mental calculation. Mrs. Brown’s luxuriant blue black hair, her clear even complexion, her brilliant teeth, her smooth, well-coloured lips, belonged to a woman of five-and-twenty, rather than to one who was the mother of a lad of fifteen. Mrs. Greatorrex, struggling with her computations, every now and then lapsed out of the conversation. Having at last settled the point that Mrs. Brown could not be less than four or five-and-thirty, Mrs. Greatorrex roused herself to take an active part in what was passing: and the first thing she heard was the rector, hoping in a very sincere voice that Mrs. Brown might like Eden; “though it was quiet, it did not usually strike strangers as

dull." How Mr. Greatorex is talking, just as if Mrs. Brown had been well recommended to him! and so she had. Mr. Greatorex's eyes had been busy with the titles of books lying on the table before him, and he had felt almost as if Mrs. Brown had shown him excellent letters of introduction.

"We must not go too fast," thought Mrs. Greatorex.

Mrs. Brown answered Mr. Greatorex, "I came here to be quiet. George needs country air."

"I suppose your son has entirely left school?" put in Mrs. Greatorex.

"He has never been at school?" returned Mrs. Brown; paused, then continued, "George has had no regular education or training; it was thought best to let him do only what he himself asked to do—he is quite untutored."

"Is he under medical treatment?" asked Mrs. Greatorex; great interest in her tone and look, but with the ease acquired by one who is much accustomed to go about among her poorer neighbours, and discuss with them their private concerns.

Mrs. Brown answered gently, but with great decision, "He requires no other care than that of his mother."

"He is a great musician, I hear," observed Mrs. Greatorex, her eyes on a grand piano. "We are all great lovers of music."

Conversation languished so sadly that Mrs. Greatorex's eyes were beginning to seek those of her husband in consultation as to ending the visit, when Charlie, rushing across the lawn, called in at the open window, "Mother, mother, do come and see!"

"I daresay Georgy is feeding the birds," said Mrs. Brown; "that is it, is it not?" and she smiled at Charlie, whose eyes were shining with eagerness.

Mrs. Brown's voice and look were really captivating when she spoke to the boy. She liked children; that was clear to Mrs. Greatorox.

"Mamma may come, mayn't she, Mrs. Brown?" said Charlie, as if the lady had been an old friend of his.

"Certainly;" and Mrs. Brown rose to lead the way, moving slowly, her hand on the little boy's shoulder, looking down into his handsome, upraised face, as he told her how he could scarcely believe his own eyes when he saw the birds out of the trees and hedges come flying at George's whistle.

"You won't be offended, will you, Mrs. Brown, at my calling him George; it would be so odd to call a fellow not much bigger than myself, Mr. Brown."

"Call him George," said Mrs. Brown.

They found the said George standing in one of the grass paths of the kitchen garden, Carry and Willie, pictures of delighted amazement, staring with all their might at young Brown, who was throwing bird-seed into the air, which some dozen chaffinches and sparrows, fluttering round him, caught ere it fell to the ground.*

"How did you manage to tame the birds so?" exclaimed Mrs. Greatorox, as the boy, after throwing one more handful to his pensioners, made a little bow to his mother's visitors.

* Some persons having doubted the possibility of this feat, they are hereby informed it may be seen performed in the gardens of the Tuileries by a gentleman who does not brook being interfered with when so engaged.

"That's my secret," replied George.

"Will you teach me, George?" asked Charlie, adding, in a voice deprecatory of offence, "Mrs. Brown says I may call you George."

"Your little brother," said George, with a dry laugh, and looking at the youngest boy, who, with his arms crossed, was still gazing at him with solemn admiration, "your little brother has just christened me afresh. He calls me Dodge."

"Poor Willie cannot pronounce all his letters yet," explained Mrs. Greatorex.

"Oh! I don't at all object to being called Dodge; indeed, I rather like and approve of it. I beg you will all call me Dodge in future."

As Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex were taking leave of Mrs. Brown and her son, Hans came forward with a large nosegay of the commonest garden flowers, and presented it to the rector's wife with a profusion of bows and smiles.

"A foreign custom," said Mrs. Brown. "Excuse the old man; if there had been only daisies and poppies, he would have thought me disgraced had he let you quit the garden without a bouquet."

"He has arranged it so well," said Mr. Greatorex, "that he has produced an admirable artistic effect. I wish he could impart some of his skill to us."

Mrs. Brown turned and repeated this praise to Hans, who spluttered out in return an offer of his services.

When they had left the Hatch some fifty yards behind, Mr. Greatorex broke the silence, with a "Well!" Mrs. Greatorex replied with another

"Well!" one in which there was still more of interrogation than in that of her husband.

"I think you must have been, as the saying is, agreeably disappointed," said the rector.

"She must have been beautiful," said the rector's lady.

"She *is* beautiful, my dear," returned the gentleman.

"Strange her coming here," observed the lady.

"Stranger, than if she had been plain?" asked the rector, slyly.

"Frankly, I should not have thought it so odd had she been an ordinary-looking person," answered Mrs. Greatorex. She was silent for a little, then said,—"I suppose, though, she has really and truly come here on account of that *odd* boy; I decidedly don't like him. I hope he won't do Charlie any harm: by the way, where are the children? I thought they had followed us."

There was no trace of them.

"They must have run back again," said Mr. Greatorex. "Poor little souls, they are delighted with the novelty of such a young original as that Master Dodge; we can send for them if they don't come home soon."

Maud had not accompanied her father and mother to the Hatch, out of deference to Escott's evident repugnance to the Browns.

"What had I better do, grandmamma?" she had asked.

Lately, that is, since she had loved Escott, Maud had taken the habit of rather consulting her grand-

mother on little difficulties of conduct, than her mother. Maud was incapable of imagining "mamma" could be wrong; it was not a preference, but an instinct which guided her to where she would have her newly developed want of sympathy supplied. Mrs. Greatorex had never in her life suffered—never had had any occasion to be uneasy as to how she should, or should not act, or been anxious as to the effect she might produce on others. She could not, of course, be blind or deaf to the existence of suffering in others; nor was she unmerciful, or unwilling to help, but she always had a private belief that it was, on the whole, "people's own doing—people's own fault," when they got into trouble; whereas, in Mrs. Lescrimière, there was a breadth and depth of sympathy, and pity, and forgiveness, quite out of the common—the misery or the anguish always hid from her the fault, if fault there was. Whether great or small the distress, her ears, her heart, her judgment were ready for any applicant, and without any of that flattering complaisance sometimes mistaken for sympathy.

"What shall I do, grandmamma?" then had Maud inquired, in the certainty of her little dilemma being treated with attention.

"It's always stupid," said Mrs. Lescrimière, "to give unnecessary pain to one that loves us; and it's not a matter of duty your calling on Mrs. Brown? Escott has a really good heart, all his"—the old lady hesitated for a word—"hardness will vanish with more experience; he is strong enough to grow more merciful, my dear; yes, I'm sure he will; let's

thank God, he is not weak:" and so Maud did not go to the Hatch.

The children came home full of tales of the delights of the Hatch. Hans had made them the most delicious, tiny sugar-cakes. They liked Mrs. Brown very much.

In the course of the evening, Mr. Greatorex said to Escott, "We paid a visit to your bugbears, to-day, and my wife found out two good qualities in Mrs. Brown." Mrs. Greatorex stared. The rector went on—"Mrs. Brown likes children and cleanliness. I saw how Mrs. Greatorex looked over and under the furniture, and then nodded her head approvingly. I understand her ways. *We like Mrs. Brown.*"

Escott, with a very grave face, said, "I am glad you have been pleased;" his voice sounded much more like, "I am sorry you have been pleased."

Carry kept diligently by the curate's side; he was rather fonder of her than of the other young ones. "What do you want of me, Carry?" he said at last.

"I have a secret to tell you," she answered; "you must come into the corner, and not let any one hear."

With her fresh, rosy lips close to his ear, she confided to him that she had told Dodge, "That's young Mr. Brown, you know, Willie called him so, that he was naughty not to come to church."

"Ay, and what did he say to that, Carry?"

"He said he should go to sleep if he did; and I told him that didn't matter, for grandmamma always

went to sleep in the sermon, and Willie snored quite loud sometimes ; and so Dodge said I was a good little girl, and perhaps he might come next Sunday, to please me, if I promised you wouldn't frown at him : and now, you won't look cross, will you, dear ?" and she kissed him.

"I won't be bribed," said Escott.

"Oh ! but you must ; do promise, that Dodge may learn to be good."

"Very well. I will not even look at your new friend."

"I say, mother," here cried out Charlie, "I forgot to tell you Dodge's father is dead."

"How do you know anything about that ?" said his mother.

"Carry asked him where his father was, and he said he hadn't one."

"Ah ! well, I am very sorry for him, poor boy," replied Mrs. Greatorax ; and then in a low voice to Mrs. Lescrimière, she said, "I am glad we know that much, however. It sets my mind at rest as to some things."



CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH-GOING AND HOP-PICKING.

THE next Sunday, the curate and Maud were, as usual, following the school children into church, when they became aware by an unmistakeable laugh that young Brown was near. The boy was under

one of the old yews with Larry Earl; Escott remembering his promise to Carry, did not turn his head that way.

The Hatch pew was close to the reading-desk, and the curate, who always read the morning prayers, saw that Mrs. Brown was there. Dodge waited outside till the words "Dearly beloved," before he came with his jaunty step up the aisle, creating a general titter among the girls and boys as he did so.

What better time than this to give a description of the Rev. Walter Escott? He never looks better than he does in his ample snow-white surplice. He is of middle height, slight, with a thin, dark face; his forehead well developed makes him seem older than he is; his eyes are hazel; his features are good; his face full of expression. He possesses in perfection that *summum bonum* to a man whose duty it is to persuade hearts—a beautiful voice. "He draws the heart out of me," was how old Miss Earl described the effect he produced on her. "It was quite another thing," she averred, "to hear Mr. Greatorax read the prayers, or Mr. Escott."

Curiously enough the curate disliked to have his voice or delivery admired; he did all in his power to be monotonous. Any emphasis or change of tone in reading the Scriptures or the Prayer-book, seemed to him a sort of sacrilege. He leaned to the opinion of the old dame who boxed her grandson's ears for not reading the Bible in his Bible voice, *i.e.* in a nasal drowsy sing-song. However, with the best will in the world, Walter Escott could not destroy the charm of his voice and accent; and while the curate

spoke, George Brown, whose strongest taste was for music, forgot to fidget and stare about him. He went into a sound sleep during Mr. Greatorex's sermon.

The rectory was jubilant at this appearance of Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Greatorex in particular rejoiced as over a new convert, saying,—“I am glad we went to see her; now my mind is quite at rest. She has been so long out of England, that perhaps she thought it was etiquette not to come to church until we had called.”

Mrs. Greatorex was in that mood when we are ready to give to the person who has procured us a heartfelt satisfaction, an unlimited credit of good reasons for the conduct that has hitherto displeased us. Even though neither Mrs. Brown nor Dodge attended afternoon service, Mrs. Greatorex again repeated that “her mind was now at rest.”

The simple explanation was, that Mrs. Brown having found that staying from church was no safeguard from visitors, saw no reason why she should further expose herself to the charge of being a heathen, or worse.

Mrs. Greatorex advised Escott to call at the Hatch. “I assure you, I think we shall find, at least Mrs. Brown, a pleasant neighbour; and there is no reason now to avoid her.”

Escott in his own mind said something not complimentary to the steadiness of women's judgment; but on reconsidering the matter, he blamed himself for expecting *that* which nature had denied to the weaker sex: being of the nobler gender, this appearance at church had not diminished his antipathy.

Nevertheless, as he had on the whole a respect for Mrs. Greatorex, arising principally, it must be owned, from her opinions being much influenced by his, he condescended to her wishes ; and putting his card-case into his pocket, and trying to stifle his unneighbourly feelings, presented himself at the Hatch. Hans shook his head, explanatory of the courteous assurance given in German, "of his regret that no one was at home."

Within a few days a card, with Mr. George Brown written in a cramped hand, appeared on Escott's writing table. The day Mrs. Brown chose for returning Mrs. Greatorex's call and a subsequent one from Mrs. Lescrimière, it happened that all the rectory family had gone to Z——. And at this point of interchange of visits, the intercourse between the Greatorexes and the Browns stopped, greatly owing to Mrs. Brown's reserve and obstinate retirement, but partly due also to a new alarm taken by Mrs. Greatorex, as to the dangers for her children of any intimacy with George. This was how it was.

Harvest was over, and merrymakings were the order of the season. "Many a youth and many a maid" passed the better part of the night in dancing, though they had to be a-field by cock-crow; and rumours reached the rector's lady, through the gossip of Eden *par excellence*, that George Brown made one at these jocund meetings. This gossip, who had decided opinions as to the necessity of the use of the rod, put the query to Mrs. Greatorex whether she thought the young gentleman's mamma could be aware of such improper condescension.

Mrs. Greatorrex, in reporting the news to Mrs. Lescrimière, said, "Indeed, and she had more than half a mind to take the bull by the horns," (a flight of fancy on the fair speaker's part, for she was a timid woman, and terrified even for a cow,) "and go and talk to Mrs. Brown of these so-said misdemeanors of her son; or, better still, if she could fall in with Master Dodge himself, she would give him a sound lecture, and ask him if he wanted companions or partners, why he did not rather seek them at the rectory."

In thus finishing her sentence, Mrs. Greatorrex's conscience gave her a little prick, and said very softly that she had not been very willing to afford the lad a choice of associates. We do occasionally accuse folks of not benefiting by opportunities we have not given them. Mrs. Lescrimière had answered, "When you come to inquire, my dear, you'll find this story only another of your gossip's bottles of smoke. The Italian proverb is safe to follow: 'Believe the half of the half of what you hear.'"

Shortly after, Mrs. Greatorrex had a chance meeting with George Brown in Farmer Earl's hop-garden. A hop-garden in a good year is a pretty sight: every woman and child in the parish goes hop-gathering; the money they thus gain provides them with clothing. Mothers carry with them their six weeks' old babies, and make beds for them on the ground close to their hop-baskets; boys and girls, from three years old and upwards, pick up with all the might of their little fingers. Only so many men as are requisite to pull up the poles and supply the pickers with the hop-bind, are allowed in the garden.

Hop-picking was a time of rejoicing for the rectory children, and all of them, under the charge of the governess, had gone early to where the picking was going on. Mrs. Greatorrex and Maud went to join them later. George Brown's merry laugh reached the two ladies as they were seeking the children: there he was, behind Jemima White, flirting vigorously with her, and Eben Hart dragging a loaded pole past them, looking as black as thunder. George was helping Jemima to pull on a pair of gloves, to do which he was on his knees, with his arms round her waist. He nodded, in the most unabashed manner, to the rector's wife and daughter who passed on with very stiff bows.

To explain George's action, it is necessary to state that hop-gatherers always beg for old gloves from the gentry in the vicinity, to save the skin of their hands from being stained or torn; and young Brown had been giving away some cheap new gloves to most of the girls, at which generosity many of the older women shook their heads mournfully.

"Dodge is going to give them all tea," cried Carry, running to her mother; "Mrs. Goodeve is getting it ready, and such lots of cakes." And before her mother could restrain her, Carry was by George's side. Presently, there he was, with the help of the rectory young ones, carrying cups of tea to the elderly ladies he had so scandalized.

"I cannot make that boy out," sighed Mrs. Greatorrex; "however, as he is doing a kindness, let us go and speak to him, Maud."

As they were making their way over prostrate

poles, wreathed with a more gracefully luxuriant vine than even that which produces the grape, the ladies met Farmer Earl, girdled with long bits of narrow wood, like so many skewers. He was stopping before one group after another, and cutting notches on these tallies and corresponding ones on that each hop-picker presented to him. Be it known to those who were never in a hop country, that the notches on the tallies were by way of a memorandum of the number of baskets filled by each individual. Farmer Earl's appearance merits a line or two. It proclaimed him one of the lords of creation by nature's patent of nobility. A man hale and hearty, and though sixty, with eyes as bright, colour as fresh, step as firm as though he had been only thirty. His was an open, frank English face, a little, a very little irony lurked in the smile that lay habitually on his lips; it was the sole outward mark left by the hardships and disappointments of life, which spare no class. He was very popular among his labourers, saying "No," and acting as though he had said "Yes;" in fact, unable to refuse help to any who asked it of him. As a matter of course, he was not a very prosperous man.

Mr. Earl liked the rector's children, in right of having dandled them all when babies; in right of being one of the principal tithe-payers, and of his office as parish churchwarden, he was (though his heart inclined to him) always a little refractory with the rector himself. In fact, Farmer Earl held the proud position of leader of the opposition in Eden; he would not be a less man than the carpenter,

Stephen Amos, the parson's churchwarden and prime minister. Eden, nevertheless, was a pattern parish for peace and general good-will.

"A good year for hops, Mr. Earl," began Mrs. Greatorrex, as the farmer presented Miss Maud with a glorious bunch of hops.

"Well, an' so it be, ma'am; but we are bound, you know, to be satisfied with the bad as well as the good. It all comes from the same hand. As I says, what's the use of complaining"—what a fine twang Eden folks bestow on that word, letters won't give the sound—"complaining, it won't keep the honey, nor yet the fly from the hops, will it now? if it wud, there'd be some advantage in flying out; as it be, I sees none, no more I do, ma'am."

"I always say, you are one of the most reasonable men I know," said Mrs. Greatorrex, "and that is why I am about to ask you for your opinion. You see young Brown very often. I want you to tell me what you think of him; would he be a proper companion for Master Charles?"

The smile on Earl's lips grew broader as he replied, "Law, bless you! what a young gentleman for fun that be; he'd make a cat split his sides with laughing, he would; he ain't no harm in him, bless you, nothing worse anyhow than a little quizzicalness like as to some folk; it comes downright natural to the lad to laugh. I sees he can't help it; he don't use bad language, never; he don't drink, won't touch a drop of beer, let alone spirits: he don't care for much as I make out 'cept amusing hisself. My sister's terrible fond of him, surc."

Here some urchins who had been waiting for the farmer to nick their tallies, at last succeeded in catching his eye. "Ah! you have filled your basket, have you?" and he accepted the basket as full, which certainly was not so, and placed the stick so eagerly held up to him against its fellow hanging to his girdle, and gave it the eagerly-desired notch.

Mrs. Greatorex did not feel justified in renewing the conversation about George, and walked on. Presently she observed to Maud,—“ I begin to believe, putting one thing and another together, that that boy must be weak-minded; that's the only way I can satisfactorily explain what looks so strange in mother and son.”

“ I can't think so, mamma, he has such fine bright eyes,” said Maud.

“ Oh! my dear, fine eyes have nothing to do with sanity. I don't mean to say he is exactly mad, only a little odd; a great many people who go loose about the world would be the better for being under surveillance; if they were, many crimes would never be committed that are committed. No reasonable mother would keep a boy of that age idle at home, unless there were some good cause.”

Maud made no answer. She knew, and every one intimate with Mrs. Greatorex knew, that it was her favourite theory that great criminals were mad, and that any conduct for which she could not find a reason, was the effect of a disordered intellect. It was the shape the benevolence took, which she had inherited from her mother. Mrs. Lescrimière would say, “ one does not know what misfortune, or temp-

tation, or indeed accident, may have led to error; what fearful circumstance plunged a creature into crime; till I do, I don't judge, I grieve." Mrs. Greatorex could not suspend her judgment; with her wrong was wrong, to be condemned and punished as such—temptation could always be overcome. St. Paul had said so. She crept out of the severe consequences of her own sentence by laying the blame on disease.

Pre-occupied by her own supposition, Mrs. Greatorex sought George, and was so motherly and pleasant in her manner to him, that the mocking spirit by which he seemed possessed was for the present exorcised. A face shining with benevolence, and lips speaking kind words, are surer weapons against evil spirits than book, and bell, and holy water to boot.

The rector's wife and George walked amicably through the hop-garden; he talking to her pretty much as any rational boy of his age might have done. Mrs. Greatorex, however, did not make use of this favourable opportunity for taking the bull by the horns, as she had declared she would; she did as most of us do, when the question is to repeat face to face, what we have said or heard behind backs,—executed some skilful passes of fence, by which she managed to extract from Master Dodge, for her own and the reader's satisfaction, that he had only been to the harvest homes of Farmer Earl and of Farmer Croft, who lived indeed on the other side of the ill-famed common, but on that occasion Hans had gone with his young master.

Mrs. Greatorex boasted not a little as to this

matter, and of how she had carried off the youth from the attractions of hop-picking.

"It all depends," she said, "on the way one takes. I remember an old Scotchman telling me that the worst method of doing good was that of always running counter to people's ideas or fancies; it was like rubbing a cat's fur the wrong way; it made sparks fly out."

"In other words, you recommend coaxing," said Mr. Greateorex, laughing.

Mrs. Greateorex did not condescend to hear, but went on,—“When I am puzzled by what I see, I confess I can't rest till I have solved the difficulty. I believe Mrs. Brown is to be pitied, not blamed.”

"I confess," said Mrs. Lescrimière, "the readiness with which good Christians suspect their neighbours does surprise me."

"Come, come, grandmamma," interposed Mr. Greateorex, "we are not prohibited from using our judgment as to the words and actions of men. What we are forbidden to do, is to attribute bad motives to what may not be clear to us, or to any act which is undeniably good in itself."

"Too fine-drawn for my intellects, most reverend son; it is said without any pros or cons, Judge not."

"Shall I give you an example of what I mean?" asked Mr. Greateorex, his eyes laughing roguishly.

"Something at my expense, probably," returned Mrs. Lescrimière; "however, let us have it."

"As when the other evening, you remember, you ascribed to England as a motive for her noble war

with France, a desire to destroy liberty in that country."

"And did not the policy of England justify the imputation?" asked Mrs. Lescrimière, boiling up directly. "You don't know what you are talking about. I recollect what you cannot. I am twenty or thirty years older than you. I heard things discussed in my childhood as daily matters of interest which you only know cursorily, and from English accounts of them. I say again, that England, in setting herself against the desire of liberty in France, caused the Reign of Terror."

"Grandmamma!" exclaimed Maud.

"Yes, my dear, it's very shocking, and very true. It was the coalition of Europe against France which forced the French to raise fourteen armies, which, without bread or shoes, were victorious armies, that beat your coalition—it was the horrible pressure from without that brought forth the Reign of Terror, and all the other abominations of that period. If the poor French had been allowed to change their bad government for a good one, been allowed to obtain the freedom they wanted and had a right to, why we should not have had Napoleon the First, he grew out of that state of things. We should not have had the Peninsular War. I should not have been the daughter of one Frenchman and the wife of another; nor you had your large black eyes, Miss Maud. Don't *you* side against France, child; your best feature comes from thence." By this time Mrs. Lescrimière had lost all her heat, and laughed her own most charming laugh at her vehemence.

In spite of the contending elements which it cannot be denied were to be found in the characters of Mrs. Lescrimière and the Greatorexes, there could hardly have been discovered in all England a more sincerely united, amiable, and upright family. But a truce to panegyrics. It is the duty of the teller of a story to allow his principal personages to develop themselves in action, and modestly confine himself to giving as agreeable a picture of their persons as is consistent with truth.

Mrs. Greatorex has been already depicted; a pretty brunette, not above forty, and looking still younger. She liked to be told she was often mistaken for Maud's elder sister. Of course there were ill-conditioned individuals who held that this was a weakness, and that to be thoroughly consistent with her position as the wife of an elderly rector, and the mother of a young lady on the eve of marriage, it would have been Mrs. Greatorex's duty to look as old as possible. To this view of her duty as wife and mother, Mrs. Greatorex demurred.

Maud was perhaps less French-looking than her mother, still her appearance also betrayed a foreign origin. Her large black eyes were fringed by lashes longer and thicker than is often seen round English orbs; and she had also a trifle of the squareness of the French face. Her expression was that of her father, the same placidity, the same smile, and also that which is very pretty in a woman, but odiously troublesome in a man,

"A dimpled chin,
Made for love to lodge in."

Mrs. Greateorex was peculiarly graceful in all her movements, whereas Maud had occasionally a little rustic *gaucherie* about her, not unpleasing, denoting as it did the never having been broken into the life of a fashionable young lady. Maud was very pretty in her every-day dress; she might have passed unnoticed in a ball-room. She had nothing of what her grandmother called "*tournaire*." Her parents thought her perfect, her brothers and sisters loved her, admired her, and plagued her in tolerably equal proportion; the whole parish, school-children included, spoke well of Miss Maud. It was amid such genial surroundings that Escott had seen and, appreciating her, had sought her hand.

It was on that occasion that Mrs. Lescrimière for the first time thought her dear Maud no wiser than other girls. Mrs. Lescrimière had *her* theories about husbands, Escott *his* about wives. This was what passed between the grandmother and lover, when he was talking over his happiness to the old lady. "Maud," he said lastly, "is indeed all that a man could desire in the woman he selects to be the mother of his children. I am sure that with her I shall have in my home an atmosphere of purity and peace, which will be as an elixir to re-invigorate my spirit, when it is fretted by that contact with folly and misery it is my business to seek."

It was against Escott's opinions as to the life of a clergyman, this falling in love and marrying, and he was, in thus speaking, not expressing his feelings, but making out a good case as to himself for himself. Mrs. Lescrimière took him at his own word. If

people only understood in time that they will often be judged rather by their silly words than their wise actions, it would save many a heartache. This by the way, as Mrs. Lescrimière did nothing further to show her disapproval of the man of her granddaughter's choice than to say, somewhat testily,—

“What do you mean to provide Maud with, in return for the elixir she is always to be conjuring for you?”

“I hope to make her happy,” returned Escott, taken aback.

“I don't ask you how,” had retorted Mrs. Lescrimière, “because if she sees you contented she'll be in the seventh heaven; but be generous, Mr. Escott, *do*, pray do sometimes remember to be grateful for that said elixir.”

Mrs. Lescrimière would have been vastly better pleased had Escott favoured her with the raptures of a young man's love; but she was mistaken in believing him to be egotistical and cold-blooded. She had the warm temperament of the south, and he the reserved nature of a thorough Briton. Independently of the peculiar ascetic notions above alluded to, he disliked and despised all shows of emotion, almost as much in women as in men. He considered them, to say the least, tiresome, and he fell into the common error, that a strong expression of feeling was a proof that the feeling itself was superficial. He was, in truth, extremely fond of Maud, but he could not have endured to have that fact passing from lip to lip, universally commented on, universally joked about. The best jokes, or rather the easiest to

make, the surest of provoking a laugh, are they not on the most serious subjects? He knew that he loved her, and she ought to be sure of that. Is not one heart aware of the tide of feeling rolling to it from another heart without words spoken?

There is a small person who must not be quite overlooked in any description of the inmates of the rectory: grandmamma's darling, papa's pet, eleven years old Carry—Carry of the dove-like eyes, blue eyes with large drooping lids. Often the mother would call the father to come and look at her asleep. There was always a smile on her face when she slept, as if the "Guardian Angel" (a large engraving representing one, hung at the head of Carry's bed), was speaking pleasant things to her in her slumber.

Of the rector himself any description may be spared. He is unremarkable in person, would not be out of place in a palace or in a cottage. So moderate in all his views and actions, doing his duty to his parishioners, his neighbours, and his family, so much, as a matter of course, having no consciousness of being better or wiser than his fellow men, that no one supposes him to be so—he is taken at his own estimate. He does not even perceive that he is underrated; therefore it is of no consequence that he is so.



CHAPTER V.

NO MAN OR WOMAN CAN LIVE LONGER AT PEACE
THAN NEIGHBOURS WILL LET THEM.

EVERY one knows the fable of the sun, the wind, and the traveller. Every one knows the wager between the first and second as to the third, and which won it.

Mrs. Brown could not help herself: she was compelled to drop her cloak, impossible to keep it on, under the warmth of attentions from the rectory.

Mrs. Lescrimière and her daughter were both serviceable women; the former needed no particular reason to make her kindly, the latter, the moment she believed she could be of use to any one, became interested in the person. Her prejudice against the Browns was fast changing, under the influence of her belief in Dodge's "oddness," into a predilection for mother and son. Scarcely a day that nurse and the children were not charged with some commission for the Hatch—a new magazine, or a review, or a plant, or some fruit from the hothouse. The Hatch was besieged.

Mrs. Brown had maintained her reserve with the ladies, but it was difficult to resist the innocent confiding familiarity of the children. She began to watch for the sound of their merry tongues, all going at once, and for the merry patter of their feet on the gravel walk below her windows; and, after a little, she rarely held out against the tone of disappointment in Carry's voice when she exclaimed, "Mrs.

Brown can't see us; oh! dear, I am so sorry. Mademoiselle, please to tell Hans so."

Mrs. Brown was an object of supreme admiration to these little folks; they really enjoyed staring at her, their enjoyment made more piquant by a mysterious feeling of curiosity, caught from their elders.

Hans, also, with his sugar biscuits and his feather brush, was a mystery and delight. The rectory children vowed he was never seen without the brush. "You can tell when he is in good humour," said Charlie, "for then he carries it upright, like a musket; when he is out of sorts, he trails it after him, just as a fowl does his tail in wet weather; and I can tell you that Hans scarcely ever speaks but when he is obliged. Mrs. Brown talks to him in German like anything, and how do you think he answers. Why, by making such funny mouths; he puts out his lips and pulls them in, and she seems quite to understand him, for she waits till he has done with his faces, and then goes on talking again. He always stays just outside the room door while we are there, and they keep the chain of the front door up, though I have told them there's no fear of thieves here."

Charlie despised Dodge as a milksop, when he discovered that the young gentleman did not care for ferrets, and knew not how to manage either puppies or pigeons. The smaller boys and girls followed their born leader Charlie, all except Carry, who remained a constant friend to Dodge. The children, having thus made a breach in Mrs. Brown's wall of defence, Mrs. Greator, one morning, in a nice soft drizzle, made *her* great attack. Two visitors, a husband and

wife, most unexpectedly came to the rectory ; two most cruelly unamusing, unamusable people. They were above or below everything. They could not talk on politics, or religion, or literature ; on principle they would not play at whist, or ecarté, backgammon, draughts, solitaire, squails, croquet, or aunt Sally. The gentleman allowed of chess ; but there was no chess-board at the rectory, and, if there had been, no one there knew a bishop from a rook. Mr. Greatorex tired himself to death taking the husband over the church, and explaining that nobody could explain what a certain painted glass window meant, or how it came there, or indeed the church itself ; there it was, nobody knew who had built it. This did seem a subject of interest to the guest, who, having heard that the Romans had certainly been in that neighbourhood, though some time ago no doubt, expected to have seen at least concrete bricks—yes, he did confess to an interest in concrete bricks. That same evening Mr. Greatorex fell disgracefully asleep in a provokingly comfortable attitude, the visitors sitting bolt upright, unable to keep their eyes from the sleeping figure. It was these perfectly unexceptionable friends of the family, who drove Mrs. Greatorex to attempt to coax Mrs. Brown into accepting an invitation to tea, for herself and George.

“ It will be a downright charity,” said Mrs. Greatorex ; “ the only diversion that animates my friends is a concert. Poor Maud is willing enough to play ; but they don’t consider her music worth listening to. It would be so very kind of George to come and give them some of his charming music.”

"I can scarcely promise for Georgey," returned Mrs. Brown.

"Oh! I'll manage him," said Mrs. Greateorex, gaily. "I know he won't refuse me." Are people often right in the estimate of their personal influence?

"As for me," continued Mrs. Brown, "I really have no dress for an evening party," and the speaker's lovely clear complexion lost its transparency in a deep flush, produced by the struggle between an earnest desire not to accept the invitation, and an unwillingness to be disobliging to one who had been now for weeks showing kindly attentions.

"Come as you are, you can't be better," cried the rector's eager lady, "there will be no other strangers besides our two guests and Mr. Escott, and you know him. Now, then, we may consider the matter settled, —such a relief, most neighbourly of you indeed. If it continues raining, we'll send the brougham for you." And muffling herself in the wraps in which she ran about the parish on charitable errands, whatever the weather, Mrs. Greateorex hurried home to do that which we have high authority for stating is the hardest task one human being can inflict on another—to entertain those who can't be entertained.

Now, it so happens that, often when we have obtained our wish, so far from resting satisfied, we constantly begin extending the limits of the same wish, or tacking on to the one with which we commenced other wishes, till the original stuff is so overlaid, we forget what it cost us to obtain our first desire, or how happy we were to have it granted.

No sooner, then, had Mrs. Greateorex conquered

Mrs. Brown's hesitation, and George's wilfulness, no sooner was she sure of amusement for the evening, than she made good the remark ventured on above. She was in her store-room when one or two extra wishes were hatched; at the moment, indeed, she was giving out to the cook different articles that were most of them, Proteus-like, to change their shapes ere they re-appeared at a charming little supper, to be served at half-past ten that night. The pastry and confectionery, as well as the rectory hospitality, were renowned, and, as Mrs. Greatorex observed to the cook, "she really could not invite Mrs. Brown and her son for the first time to a mere tea and turn out."

The cook answered,—“La, 'm, what a pity to have everything so nice for so few.”

“So it is, Jane,” replied the mistress, and fell into a reverie while opening the coffee canister and other receptacles of grocery. Then, presently staring absently at the cook, and speaking half to her, half in soliloquy,—“There's time for Charlie to ride to Belmont and back before three o'clock, and I am sure the Lonsdales would be glad to come, and what difference can it make to Mrs. Brown whether she meets two strangers or four?”

The cook said, “What, indeed, she should like to know?”

Mrs. Greatorex, however, was not the woman first to do an imprudence, and then defend it. She was not at all one of the common run of her sex, so she consulted—no, so she told the rector what she was inclined to do.

“Did you make any promise to Mrs. Brown, that

there should be no one else asked, or did she make any conditions?" inquired the husband.

"Neither the one nor the other," replied the wife; "she made some excuse about her dress, that was all."

"It's a case of conscience, I perceive," said the rector; "you must decide it for yourself, Louisa."

Exactly what Mrs. Greatorex had expected him to say; now she was on safe ground, she knew what she was about. She had told Mr. Greatorex first, and, come what would, he could not say she had not spoken to him on the subject. And, then, he was not one to exult over the mistakes of his neighbour; had he been one of those who aggravate one's self-reproach, Mrs. Greatorex would have acted with more circumspection. The ancients worshipped and offered sacrifices to Fear; on what shrine do *we* oftenest lay our obedience in our domestic circles?

Charlie rode off full gallop with a note to Belmont; he passed George Brown on the way with only a flourish of his whip. Charlie knew, as well as if his mother had confided it to him, that she would not wish the Browns to hear of the invitation to the Lonsdales. It's a curious and dangerous faculty that which children and servants have of guessing the secret thoughts and wishes of parents and masters; if we look well about us for an instance in point, we may remember that episode in Henry the Second's life which has to do with Thomas à Becket.

Before Charlie returned, Mrs. Greatorex had decided she should be pleased whatever the answer sent by the Lonsdales; whether they came or not, it would be much the same thing, she should have

returned *their* last tea-party, or as Mr. Lonsdale termed it, tea-fight. Charlie was later in coming home than his mother had expected; he was radiant, he had had a famous game of croquet with two "such jolly girls," and a brother, who were staying at Belmont. They were all coming, to be sure; he had told them of George Brown's playing. There was Mrs. Lonsdale's note.

Mrs. Greatorex was vexed. "It's very provoking," she exclaimed.

"Only two more?" said the rector.

"Yes, Mr. Greatorex, but two more, and two more make a difference; men never understand these things."

Mrs. Brown certainly had understood that the only strangers she should meet was the pair of petrifications, who needed an Orpheus to animate them; but whatever her surprise, or annoyance, neither sensation appeared in her countenance. All the ladies, excepting Mrs. Lescrimière, were very fine; excusable where there were so few opportunities for wearing those best gowns which had to be provided for the one or two annual galas given by the Member's or the Baronet's wife.

Mrs. Lonsdale, a bulky woman, of age and features no way remarkable, was only smart in the way of jewellery; she shone with gold wherever gold could be put: head, arms, neck, fingers, and waist. She and her husband had spent the best years of their life in Australia to some purpose: she was very suggestive of nuggets. The blonde young lady in hard bright blue, the brunette in hard bright maize silk,

as they sat side by side, not like twin cherries or twin rosebuds, made the grave gentleman's eyes water. The grave wife had unaccountable fringes dangling from unaccountable places, and even Mrs. Greatorrex, though she carried off her finery with the air of a small queen, could have spared much of it, and the loss been a gain. Maud, not being responsible for her adornment, it shall be passed over in friendly silence. The little girls in short white frocks and long white stockings, pocket-handkerchief between finger and thumb, sat demurely on a settee, flanked by their little brothers in tunics, and belts, and knickerbockers. Charlie played the man, stretching his neck to look on a par with the Oxonian, the brother of the grown-up young ladies in blue and maize.

The gentlemen, that is, Mr. Lonsdale, the unamusable guest, and Mr. Greatorrex, stood on the rug, their backs to the chimney. They were all grave as judges; in country parsonages people don't dash into any or all subjects, or make recklessly free with facts or persons. No, whatever is said, is said without that leaning to pleasantry or wit, which might end in what Solomon compares to the crackling of thorns. In great societies, wit is everything, truth nothing; in small ones, the same results are arrived at, but differently. Escott, who had a horror of even harmless country tittle-tattle, had withdrawn into his favourite place, the hollow of the curve of the grand piano, with a book in his hand—a shallow pretence, used as a shield from conversation; he saw and heard all that went on in every part of the room.

Mrs. Brown was in the seat of honour, George

behind her, in a recess. The silence that followed the Browns' arrival was like that described in the libretto of "*Le Désert*"—to be seen and heard. Every one was scrutinizing Mrs. Brown, who, in her plain black silk dress, looked something like a portrait by Vandyke, surrounded by pictures from a fashion-book.

The grave lady wore an air of hostility—the look which generally welcomes a new arrival among men or beasts. Mrs. Lonsdale's sharp small blue eyes became suspicious as well as curious. Mrs. Lonsdale had for twenty years needed to be on her guard, and habits are not easily broken. From the grave gentleman's face cleared away something of its fractious expression. Mr. Lonsdale, a tall, thin, handsome man (who, by-the-by, was addicted to the utterance of short, unconnected sentences), desirous of notice, grew fidgety.

Tea was got over in the long summer twilight; when lamps and candles were brought, Mrs. Greatorex persuaded the *blonde* and the *brune* to favour the company with a duet. The young ladies managed to accomplish one after the various common accidents on such occasions, such as false starts, &c. Mrs. Greatorex had, in the meantime, been whispering to every one what a treat was in store for them in young Brown's playing. One must have lived in the depths of the country to appreciate all the value of a novelty at a tea-drinking. George, however, hung back, both sulky and shy—a new phase, indeed, of his mental state. The excess of disappointment visible in the face of the rector's wife, and the despair in her voice moved Mrs. Brown to remonstrate with

George. He yielded, though with a bad grace ; all his sauciness had vanished ; instead of his quick little step, he shuffled along to the piano with crimson flushed cheeks.

“What an odd-looking boy,” exclaimed Mrs. Lonsdale to the grave lady by whom she was seated ; “and what a theatrical dress—preposterous for a lad of that age.”

“The mother must do it to make people think he is younger than he is,” answered the grave lady.

“What age do you suppose *her* to be ?” asked Mrs. Lonsdale. “Mr. Lonsdale says one can never tell a woman’s age by candle-light. I wonder what *she* can do ?”

“Do ?” repeated the grave lady, adding, sententiously ; “what does any pretty woman need to do but let herself be admired ?”

George had been preluding with a little hesitation ; he now played, and astonished his hearers as much as Mrs. Greatorrex could have desired.

“Depend on it,” remarked the grave lady, “those people are professional. I know what playing is : my husband and I attend every concert in London during the season, and no one will ever make me believe *that’s* amateur playing,” and the grave lady crossed her legs in an offended manner.

Mrs. Lonsdale, having no appropriate speech of Mr. Lonsdale’s to quote, was silent, uncertain whether the grave lady’s speech meant censure or praise ; for, as far as she was concerned, she did not know “Rule Britannia,” save by the words, from “Partant pour la Syrie.”

"I cannot let you get up yet," said Mrs. Greatorex to George. "Just once more—anything you like—it is such a very great treat."

George had recovered his sang-froid and petulance, and, with them, the command of his fingers; he played an Italian air so exquisitely, with such thrilling power, that Escott felt his heart pierced by the notes, and tears filled his eyes. The grave town lady gave the colonial one a significant side glance, and whispered, "Tell me that's a private performer, indeed!"

When George left the piano and the Oxonian took his place, favouring the company with Negro songs, the whole party woke up to life. That was the great success of the evening, *auream mediocritatem*. Every one understood what was doing. Accident often accomplishes more for us than foresight.

It was not likely that Escott should have forgotten the voice he had stopped to listen to in passing the Hatch. During the evening he went with Mrs. Greatorex to beg Mrs. Brown to sing.

"I played the eavesdropper once," he said; "I will tell you even what I heard you sing,—*Il segreto per esser felice.*"

Mrs. Brown grew very red, and said, earnestly, and curtly,—"I never sing to any one now; I could not, indeed: pray drop the subject." It was so evidently a disagreeable one, that to press the request further would have been uncourteous.

After the Lonsdales and their guests were gone, Escott managed to get near George, who, until the Oxonian's departure, was not to be lured out of the corner behind his mother.

"It is long," said the curate, "since I have had such a treat as your playing."

"Well, perhaps it is a shade better than Larry Earl's squeaking on the fiddle," answered George, with mock gravity. He continued,—"I have such fun at John Earl's on Sunday evenings. I set them to sing psalms, and it is so droll. I wish you would come and hear them, wouldn't it make you die of laughing."

Dodge was dressed in a loose black velvet tunic, with a belt round his waist, and as the young scapegrace looked up roguishly in Escott's face, something in the attitude of the two figures reminded Mrs. Lescrimière of one of Gavarni's sketches of the Carnival,—that one in which the girl, disguised as a boy, says to her companion, *Je t'antipathe*. Mrs. Lescrimière very nearly laughed aloud.

The grave pair retired to their room as soon as Mrs. Brown and George were gone, and the family were at liberty to talk over the evening.

As regarded Mrs. Brown's beauty, there was entire unanimity—entire unanimity also as to her looking too young to be the mother of Dodge.

Escott, who had been pacing up and down the room, a custom of his when in an intimate domestic circle, said with an animation that astonished Maud,—
"The lady's quiet grace is charming, and in my opinion more uncommon still than her beauty. It is the stranger," he added, "that she has not taught her son better manners."

"I am more convinced than ever," said Mrs. Greatorrex, "that the boy is not quite right in his

mind, and she, poor thing, does her best, by not thwarting him, to prevent people from taking notice of his odd ways."

"You may be right," said Escott, "though for my part, I think the young fellow more knave than fool."

"You are tenacious of first impressions, I must say," observed Mrs. Lescrimière. "To others Dodge, as the children call him, seems merely somewhat silly, idle, and headstrong, not very different from many other boys left to a mother's sole management. The mother interests me far more than her son: she gives me the idea of a person under a spell; makes me think of the lady in *Comus*, or a nymph turning gradually into stone—of something neither living nor dead; something pagan, something supernatural."

"Grandmamma, you make my flesh creep!" said Mr. Greatorrex. "It's very naughty of you to frighten us, after having led us, perhaps, into the scrape of consorting with a Pixie, or Nixie, or ——"

"No, no," interrupted Mrs. Lescrimière, quite gravely, pre-occupied with her own thoughts. "I'll tell you what she looks to me,—what nobody else ever gave me the slightest conception of,—the impersonation of that terrible fable of a person with a sword suspended over his head by a thread."

"Dear grandmamma," said Mr. Greatorrex, "which of us is not living under the suspended sword of an unknown destiny? It's not right, nevertheless, to spoil the present by vain conjectures as to the past or the future. 'Let little joys refresh us,' says a wise man; and see how gloomy we all are,

instead of rejoicing over a pleasant evening, during which, thanks to the Browns, no one has gone to sleep. Now, Escott, away with you, or you'll get into certain trouble with your landlady."



CHAPTER VI.

THE LOST SHEEP.

Two fields behind the schoolhouse of Eden, is a tolerably high mound, surrounded by water. This rising ground goes by the sounding title of the Castle Hill, and is in all seriousness believed to have been a Roman fortification belonging to the period when, according to tradition, Julius Cæsar planted nettles in the neighbourhood to keep his soldiers warm. Tradition is silent as to how this was accomplished; one thing is positive—the nettles all round Eden have the same air of grandeur as other Roman remains, and are equally enduring also. The table-land of the Castle Hill is covered thickly with tall fir-trees; the banks, sloping rapidly down to the water, are overgrown with tangle of brushwood, with here and there a willow-tree seeking the water; a famous place in spring for primroses and wild anemones, and a sight to take the trouble to go to, when the hyacinths are in bloom. All below the fir-trees 'tis—

"Blue as if the sky let fall
Flowers from its cerulean wall."

As for the water, the willows searched for it with

the perseverance of love, for it lay hidden (at least close to the foot of the mound) by tall sedges, with leaves like lances, and white flowers stained with purple; while on the side next the field it was covered with a dark, glossy, small-leaved cress. The rectory children were forbidden to play by themselves anywhere near this species of moat; it was a dangerous place even in summer, when the water was comparatively shallow; for along its bed trailed long armed weeds, and it was, besides, full of holes. In winter, swelled by the rains and the influx of many small tributaries, it became a deep, sullen, swift-flowing river, and at one point, where its bank had been purposely narrowed, it rushed impetuously into the mill-stream.

After having been to the school to give a lesson in geography, Escott passing through the Castle Hill field, came suddenly upon young Brown lying on the grass by the side of the water. He was in a half-reclining attitude, leaning on his elbow. He might have easily heard Escott's steps, but he never turned his head. The curate stopped, and something in the smallness and childishness of the figure he was looking at made him exclaim, "Ridiculous!" half aloud, as he thought of his own ill-will and resentment to such a mere boy.

It was one of those hot summer days, which subdues all nature except man. The leaves of the trees are languidly silent, the birds do not sing, the cows hide their sides in the longest grass they can find, and the sheep lie under every ragged thornbush.

Escott, passing close to where Dodge lay, stooped

to see if he were asleep. "Wide awake, Mr. Escott," said Dodge, without moving. "I am listening to the water."

"You must be Fine Ear himself, if you catch any sound of its sluggish course," observed Escott, suspicious that the lad was trying to mislead him.

"You would not say so, if you were to sit quietly by me for a while," returned Dodge.

Escott sat down out of curiosity.

"Listen," went on Dodge, "and you will hear all sorts of pretty little noises. I can hear the click of the winged insects darting in and out among the leaves."

The curate and the boy sat silent for a little, Escott puzzled by this sympathy with nature, in one whose habits had appeared to him so wanting in refinement. For the first time he took a good look of Dodge. Another puzzle: this creature whom some thought crazy, and he himself had stigmatized as knavish, struck him at that moment as having one of the most remarkable and peculiar countenances he had ever seen. The eyes were like those of his mother, only bright to an incredible degree; indeed his whole face, transfigured by the ecstasy of his enjoyment, looked to Escott as though it were some transparent vase illuminated from within.

"You don't hear musical sounds? I do," murmured Dodge, "like tiny harps. How sweet it all is! Don't you feel as if your heart were growing bigger and bigger, too big to stay in your body? I do; oh! if I had wings to go up into that beautiful blue!"

While Escott was listening, gazing and wondering, Dodge threw aside his cap, and, as he did so, a ray of sunshine, flickering through the opposite trees, fell tremulously on his fair curls, turning them to the hue of gold. Was this really George Brown, that mischievous, tiresome sprite, or was Escott dreaming?

Before the curate got further in his conjectures, Dodge softly touched his arm, whispering, "Look there, at that beauty;" and pointed to one of those gossamer insects with diaphanous blue and gold wings which was darting round and round George's head, as if sensible of his admiration.

"How is it that you love nature so much, and the God who made it so little?" asked Escott.

The light faded from out of Dodge's face; it took its usual hue of pallor.

"How do you know what I feel? I have never told you," said Dodge with a proud, almost disdainful gesture of the head; then suddenly smiling, he added, "I am no worse, am I, than the birds and the flowers and the butterflies? you don't think it wrong in them to enjoy the little time they have to live, do you?"

There were curiously caressing tones in the boy's voice which troubled Escott; he did not like to feel that he was inclined to be indulgent to the speaker; anything approaching to indulgence on this subject was temporizing with actual wrong, so he said gravely,

"God, in endowing human beings with the faculties to perceive and reflect on the wonders of His creation, has in a manner given them a ladder to mount towards Himself, and——"

"Oh! don't, there's a good man, begin to ser-

monize and spoil my pleasure," interrupted George. "I was really very happy."

Escott would have despised himself had he not persisted. "But I wish to increase your happiness."

Dodge here gave a low whistle. Escott got up.

"Now I have offended you," said Dodge. "I did not mean to do so. You vex me first, and then I vex you; it is very odd how uncomfortable people always are together."

"I am not vexed," said Escott in a tone that belied the assertion. "I cannot stay here any longer, I have a long walk before me."

"Where are you going?" asked Dodge, in a tone of curiosity.

"I am on my way to Dunleuce Wood, to seek for a rather rare flower."

"A flower? what is it like? Perhaps I know it," said Dodge, "and can tell you where to find it."

"Not probable, as I have for two summers sought in vain for a perfect specimen. It is a flower with three petals spreading out something like a wild rose; it grows in shady places where there's moss."

"I should like to see it. May I go with you?"

"Better not, it's not safe to do so without thick gaiters; for the brown-striped adder often lies under its leaves, and is so like the ground it is not easily seen."

"No, then I shan't try; I am horribly afraid of snakes;" and Dodge perceptibly shuddered. "I suppose you want the flower for Miss Maud? does she know you have to go among snakes to get it?"

"It is for myself," said Escott stiffly.

“And what’s the name?” asked Dodge.

“*Pyrola Rotundifolium*.”

“What may that be in English? I don’t understand Latin.”

Irritated by the off-hand way Dodge had questioned him, quite as if he had a right so to do, Escott’s indulgent feelings of ten minutes ago vanished, and he answered sharply, “It would be better if, instead of idling about, you did study the Latin grammar: ask Charlie Greatorex to teach you; ignorance is neither creditable nor agreeable at your age,” and then the curate turned on his heel, without waiting to see the effect of his reproof. He could not so easily rid himself of the recollection as of the presence of Master Dodge. “Strange fitful boy, so repulsive at one moment, at another almost—” Escott’s thought halted before it added, “attractive;” he could find no other word. “And the mother, another enigma. Beautiful as she was, it was difficult to say whether the sensation she gave was not rather one of curiosity than of pleasure; probably the mountain will bring forth a mouse, and we shall find out the cause of her retirement and reserve to be a very prosaic one. In this age there are no sorcerers or witches to fear the faggot: on the contrary, mediums and spirits are in vogue: by-the-by, that boy might be——”

Here Escott, nearly at the top of the field, was disturbed by a shout of his name, followed by a child’s scream. He turned and saw Dodge stooping over the water, and a little boy by his side, wringing his hands. Escott ran back to see what had happened.

“Make haste,” cried Dodge, as soon as the curate

was within hearing, and stamping with impatience; "here's a poor lamb tumbled into the moat—widow Smith's lamb. Do come fast."

Dodge and the small shepherd had tried to hook out the poor animal, a half-grown sheep, with sticks, but it had got fairly caught by some of the long-armed weeds of the muddy bed.

"There's nothing to be done but to go after it," said Escott. He took off his coat and stepped into the water; it was deeper than he had expected, far above his knees; however, he reached the so-called lamb, and extricated it from the net of withes in which it had been caught. "I shall get out easier with the beast, if I go lower down," said Escott, "where it is narrower."

"No, no, don't," exclaimed Dodge; "this child says it's very deep there. Come back, do, Mr. Escott; indeed you had better."

"Nonsense," returned Escott to these entreaties, and, with the lamb in his arms, began to wade.

"I declare you look like the pictures of St. John," cried Dodge.

"Never mind what I am like, but reach or throw me that child's long stick."

The weeds and Escott's weight were too much for the stick: it broke, and the curate only saved himself from an awkward fall, by such a violent jerk of his person backwards, and a snatch at the sedges, that Dodge could not restrain a laugh. The poor lamb was once more in the water.

"Oh! pick it up, pick it up, please, sir," implored the little shepherd, beginning to blubber at the

ominous frown on Escott's brow, caused by young Brown's untimely laugh. No man particularly enjoys being in an awkward position before witnesses, and Escott was among the most sensitive to ridicule. He made no answer to the entreaty, but waded again after the lamb, and this time, instead of approaching the bank on which the two boys were standing, he made for the narrow outlet. They ran to meet him, Dodge carrying Escott's coat. As soon as the curate was near enough to the edge, he put down the lamb on the grass, scrambled out without appearing to notice the hand Dodge held out to him, taking his coat with a dry "thank you."

The first thing the little shepherd did on seeing his lamb safe, was to give it a good blow.

"You do that again," said Dodge, "and I'll throw your sheep back into the water; take care, for I'll watch," and then Dodge ran after Escott, who had walked on without any ceremony of leave-taking.

"Are you not going for the flower?" asked Dodge.

"Not very possible, in this pickle," replied Escott, who was all slime and mud up to his knees.

"And there are always adders near that flower?" persisted Dodge.

"I can't say, always; but frequently."

"And do people die of the bite, Mr. Escott?"

"Seldom; it depends on the state of the blood, but the bitten limb swells."

"I once read a German story," said Dodge, "about a young man who could not be happy without going in search of some blue flower he had seen

in his dreams. He met with all sorts of adventures, I know, just as you did to-day, in saving the lamb."

What with his questions and his rambling talk George Brown was as vexing to Escott as a fly buzzing about his ears; he had twenty minds to do to him what he would have done to the fly,—flap him away, if not with his handkerchief, with some more candid than polite rejoinder. But while striving against this inclination, the tormentor exclaimed, "We must run, there's a heavy shower coming."

True enough; the sky was cloudlessly bright before them, but behind, great purple black clouds were rolling up quickly. Dodge went on,—

"Don't they look like those horrible genii who come out of a box, and spread and spread till you cannot see the end of them?"

Escott did not think it worth while to answer, and Dodge, looking in his face, could not mistake the meaning of its expression; therefore, though he continued to walk in a line with Escott, he did not again speak,—not until, as they were crossing the Lea, a distant growl of thunder was quickly followed by a tolerably loud clap; then Dodge said, "Had we not better go under the trees?" He had come close to the curate's side; there was such a real fear in the voice that Escott glanced at the boy—he was white as paper.

"Don't you know it is very dangerous to take shelter beneath trees in a thunder-storm? they are conductors of lightning. We must keep in the open ground."

Another smart clap, then a loud crash, which made

Dodge cling to Escott's arm. The curate said, as if to himself, "God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth He which we cannot comprehend."

When the storm had rolled away, Escott said, "Did you ever hear those words before?"

"No, but you know already that I am very ignorant, Mr. Escott." The boy's head was turned so that Escott could not see he was looking sad.

"They are from a book I suspect you have studied very little," said Escott, severely enough; "a book written equally for the ignorant as the wise. I mean the Bible;" and as he finished speaking, he made a motion which reminded Dodge to drop the arm he had seized in his fright and was still holding. "You should try to strengthen your nerves," added the curate.

When they reached the turning that led to the Hatch, Dodge politely asked Escott to come home with him and have his clothes dried. Escott positively declined, saying he preferred going on to his own lodgings. Just as they were parting, one of the school children came running to Escott to tell him that Betsy Curtis was dying, and crying to see him. Escott turned at once to retrace some of the road he had just traversed. George Brown stood watching him till he was out of sight.



CHAPTER VII.

THE PYROLA.

SITTING for hours, as he had done, in his wet clothes, while soothing Betsy Curtis's last hours in this world, had given Escott a severe feverish cold. Hitherto, Escott, a really excellent man, has not in these pages appeared in a pleasant light. For the real character of the curate, we must apply to the poor, the sick, the sorrow-stricken. They will tell you he never spares himself, nor his purse, and by sick beds he is as gentle as a woman, ay, indeed, and will sit up night after night with any one, enemy or friend, if he think he can be of benefit or comfort.

"Do you see that man?" said the largest butcher of Z——, pointing out Escott to a new customer. "He ain't over above well dressed, is he—his coat ain't new, nor his hat? Well—you'd take him for a poor gentleman—that man gives away, to my knowledge, five pounds a week to the poor. No fear of his example being followed; but he'll get through the eye of the needle if any do."

John Earl stood up for church and state, and nothing to do "with the Romans and their hosts," and consequently disapproved of the evening services on Saints' days, which Escott always performed. Nevertheless, John never used his influence to prevent the people attending those services after working hours. "It keeps the pence in their pockets," affirmed John Earl, "and that's one of the best

miracles a Saint can work." The secret of Escott's influence in the parish was, that men saw that he was in earnest; they might think him severe, but they felt he was genuine. This is what makes a man a leader among his fellows.

"Sweetness in temporal matters is deceitful; it is a labour and a perpetual fear; it is a dangerous pleasure, whose beginning is without providence, and whose end is not without repentance." Laying these words of St. Augustine to heart (Escott studied the works of the early Fathers of the church), the curate imposed fasts on his heart as well as on his body, and his keen sensibilities, curbed and cramped, revenged themselves by turning a little acid; and now we have the origin of that grain of harshness which marred the perfection of his character.

Among the many essential differences between town and country, is the anxiety country feels in the health of its neighbours. In a rural parish, an invalid, whether gentle or simple, forms a nucleus of interest. He or she is the topic, the only topic; every one goes to inquire who can, and those who cannot insist on having a bulletin somehow.

When, for instance, Mr. Breffet, the clerk, was laid up with a sprained foot, all the family at the rectory visited him daily, sent him newspapers, and coddled him as if he had been a pet child, instead of a tall, gaunt man, who took a gloomy view of the affairs of this world and the next. Imagine, then, the commotion in Eden when it was known that Mr. Escott could not officiate on Sunday. Mr. Breffet had had it from Mr. Escott's own lips, and experi-

enced as Mr. Breffet was as to Mr. Escott, "a man," he would say, "as never giv' in as long as he'd a leg to stan' on," it was Mr. Breffet's opinion that Mr. Escott must be in a bad way. "That voice now of his—where did one ever hear the like of it?—was enough for any man of observation to tell one all could not be right with Mr. Escott."

Mrs. Breffet's prominent eyes and those of her five daughters, Amelia, Rosina, Philippa, Eleanora, and Sibella (Breffet was popularly believed to be a greater reader than rector or curate), well, all these six pair of prominent eyes filled with tears at this opinion of their Pope. The elder girls, a usual case, worshipped the handsome grave curate; the most disinterested of worships, considering that they were delighted to have him connected with Eden through his marriage with Miss Maud. They should not altogether lose him. The parish churchwarden, the very head and front of the opposition in the vestry meetings, alarmed by Mr. Breffet's report, went in person to inquire for the curate. The rector's churchwarden and prime minister, not satisfied with inquiring, asked to see Mr. Escott. When told he might go in, Stephen Amos slipped off his thick shoes, and putting on a pair of yellow leather slippers, went on tip-toe into Escott's sitting-room.

"Well, sure, sir, I'm glad to see you looking not so bad," said Amos, in the subdued voice he thought befitted the occasion. "I heerd now you wer' very bad."

"I daresay Breffet has been looking out for a snug lying for me in the churchyard," said Escott;

"but sit down, Stephen, and tell me all the news."

Stephen laughed, such a laugh, a whisper of a laugh, like the noise children make when, with fast clasped hands, they hit their knee, and cry, "Don't you hear the money chink?"

"Thank you, sir," began Amos, sitting down uncomfortably on the corner of a chair, a tacit acknowledgment of his superior's condescension; "I hope not so bad as that yet, sir, but now, Mr. Escott, d'ye see I have a book, I bought a lot, I'm sure I can't tell why, at old Sir Henry's sale, and when I brought 'em home I didn't know whatever to do with 'em, not I," here another of Stephen's laughs. "But, says I, as I hev' been and bought 'em, I may as well see what's in 'em, and that's how I came on one written by Agrippa; perhaps, sir, now, you may know what King Agrippa that was? And Stephen, a hand on each knee, looked like one well pleased to have given another a hard nut to crack.

"I am only familiar with one King Agrippa," said Escott, keeping his countenance, "and that's the Agrippa before whom St. Paul defended himself."

"See that, now, if I didn't hit on the same," exclaimed the delighted carpenter; "says I to my wife, 'Haryet, it must be King Agrippa, him as was almost a Christian.'"

"I don't say that the King Agrippa of the Acts, and your author, are one and the same," said Escott; "however, let me hear what your book is about."

"Now, sir, that's what I am coming to; it's full of conjuring and what not, and I lights on a recipe

for a cold, and says I, 'Perhaps it may be worth trying, seeing it be such a old one;' this is it, sir," and Stephen read from a page of his memorandum book, "Take young ash leaves, and dry 'em and pound 'em to dust, mix 'em with honey and adder's fat, and it's a infallible cure for lung complaints."

"Thank you, Stephen, but the prescription does not persuade me."

"I can't say I think much of it myself, sir; but I thought as how I'd mention it."

"I should like to see that book, Stephen: will you bring it to me?"

"So I will, sir, so I will," returned Amos, recovering from a temporary mortification. "But now, Mr. Escott, if you've no objection, I'll just do young Mr. Brown's commission," and opening the door just sufficiently to put his mouth and chin through, the carpenter called to Mrs. Slater to be so good as to hand him that 'ere trug.* Shutting the door as carefully as he had opened it, Stephen presented to Escott's astonished eyes a beautiful specimen of the *Pyrola*, one flower open; the whole plant had been taken up carefully by the root.

"How did young Brown manage to get this?" asked Escott, examining it with the delight of a botanist.

"Get it?" cried Stephen. "I fancy it was a business."

"In what way?"

"Why them young boys ain't no sense; he sends for me to bring it to you, and when I see him, I

* "Trug," a wooden basket.

couldn't help saying, 'Laws bless us, Mr. George, whatever be the matter?' Sir, he was as white as my hand." Escott made no objection to the simile. "'I got a bite,' says he, 'from an adder, but it's done me no harm,' says he. 'Hans cured me. I'll tell you how it was, Amos,' says he. 'I wanted to get the flower for Mr. Escott, because I stopped him going to the wood for it t' other day; but it was so dark and whist-like, except every now and then a rustle, I daredn't go in by myself, so I asked Jemima White to go with me.' 'Lord, sir,' says I, 'why didn't you get Larry Earl or some of the boys; what's the use of a girl?' Says he, laughing, 'I like girls best.' I shakes my head at him, and says he, 'Now, Amos, you leave preaching to Mr. Escott, he does it best.' Bless me, he's a wild little chap, that. Well, he goes on, sir, and says he, 'Such a place as that wood, no seeing where you put your foot for brakes and briars. We beat about us with sticks, Jemima and I, for fear of vipers, but at last,' says he, 'I spied the flower, and I was in such a hurry I forgot to look about me, and I was digging away when I felt something like a pin run into my ankle. I looked down and there was a brown adder, and somehow I wasn't afraid and I put my foot on its head, and Jemima hit it on the back, and what do you think?—it broke in half, and that made me sick, and I ran away; but after a little I went back and brought away the root. You please take it with my compliments to Mr. Escott, and tell him my nerves are getting stronger; don't forget, my nerves are getting stronger. I can't send Hans, he'd blunder the English,' says he."

“And you are sure he is now quite well,” inquired Escott.

Amos replied, “Well, he ain’t by no manner of means what I should call a strong lad; should you, sir? but he is a merry one, and always sociable. Says I to Mr. George, ‘Why not take it yourself, and show it first to the ladies at the rectory?’ ‘No, no,’ says he, ‘you take it straight to the curate, I owed it to him, that’s why I got it, for nothing else, I can tell you, Amos;’ and so, sir, here it is safe and sound.”



CHAPTER VIII.

CHIAROSCURO.

ONE of Mr. Escott’s first visits after he was able to go out, was to the Hatch. He owed thanks to George Brown for his chivalric conquest of the Pyrola, and to Mrs. Brown for polite inquiries made by Hans in his best broken English. The Hatch lay midway, or thereabouts, between the rectory and Mrs. Slater’s farmhouse, in which Escott had rooms. Hitherto Escott had always made a circuit to avoid passing the Browns’ gate; but after his call at the rectory on the second day he was able to go thither, he stopped at the Hatch on his way home. He found Mrs. Brown alone. She welcomed her visitor courteously, —deviated even so far from her usual reserve as to advise him to take a chair on the farther side of the room from the open windows.

From where he was seated he could see the lawn

with its boundary of tall evergreens, the monotony of colour and line broken by here and there a tall, slender mountain ash or trembling aspen; the whole steeped in golden sunshine. A gentle air wafted into the room the odour of a bed of mignonette, and so tranquil was it, that a large hare, after reconnoitring from below a laurustinus, came and sat on the smooth shaven grass.

Escott watched the uneasy timorous beast, its ears restlessly jerking, strained to catch the slightest sound. The curate forgot that he was silent. He was yet in that stage of convalescence when utter idleness is so grateful; when one is better pleased to watch the clouds sailing over the sky, or the waving of a tree—or even if sky and clouds and trees are not to be had, better pleased to trace the pattern of a paper or a carpet, than one would be, to listen to the wittiest talker of our acquaintance.

Escott had not yet recovered his usual strength and spirits; both had been tried that morning at the rectory. The children had got a holiday because mademoiselle had gone out for the day; consequently, they were perpetually running in and out of the drawing-room; then the nursemaids were as perpetually coming to look after the young ones, or one servant or another bringing in messages, occupying the attention of the ladies. Escott had not been able to secure five minutes of Maud's undivided attention. Her serenity and activity would have been an admirable study for a man in strong health, and who did not care to have her sitting quietly by his side with thoughts and words exclusively devoted to

him. He was not different from other good men, who, as a rule, seldom show greater philosophy under small interruptions, than their more fallible brethren. Then, too, he was at the rectory close upon the fatal hour for the arrival of the uniformly tipsy old postman, who carried the letter-bag to the nearest town, and Mrs. Greatorex had still a letter to finish.

The mother of the family being unavailable, Maud was applied to; it was, "Tie on my hat, Maud," or, "If you please, miss, old Mrs. Green has come down and wishes to speak to you." No one at the rectory ever thought of pleading its being an unseasonable time to see any applicant. Maud was scarcely in the room again before Mrs. Lescrimière, who could not move from her chair, because she was holding brown paper soaked in vinegar to the forehead of a little fellow who had tumbled downstairs, said, "Do up the newspapers, my dear."

The last cry for help came from Mr. Greatorex; putting his head in at the door, he called, "Maud, I cannot manage this parcel—it must go to-day, will you come and see to it?"

In short, the scene was an every-day scene in houses like that of the Greatorexes. Maud knew how distasteful all this bustle and confusion was to Escott; yet, while her deep black eyes were constantly turning towards him, as if to ask pardon, for being dutiful and forbearing, she answered every call with courageous good humour. Yes, it was courageous to be cheerful and placid when the person she loved best was looking so distressed; her virtue was her sole reward at that moment, for

Escott, worn out by internal irritation and external noise, declined staying to dinner. "It is not your fault, dear," he said, replying to her look of disappointment.

The quiet of Mrs. Brown's sitting-room was just what he required, and she seemed to divine this, for she let him sit undisturbed staring out at the myriads of ephemera hovering over the grass, and the rooks flying back to the old trees at the priory. The hare spurred by imaginary fears had fled long ago.

When Escott woke up out of this dreamy state, he saw Mrs. Brown, a small table before her, occupied evidently with some household needlework. Never had he seen a sweeter picture of mature womanhood than she presented at that moment; busy yet thoughtful, the movement of her fingers was rapid, beautiful fingers, on one of which was the wedding-ring, no other ornament on hand or wrist. The contrast between her homely occupation and the elevated cast of her countenance was piquant and attractive.

"You are very good to be so patient with such a stupid visitor," began Escott.

"You came in very tired," she said, without looking up.

"And you granted me the best remedy—perfect repose. I assure you, it is delightful to be let alone."

"You mean," she replied, "it is delightful to be neglected when you are not in the mood for attentions."

"Perhaps—but is it not strange, how little penetration people in general have, as to the right or wrong moment for showing one attentions—and the

worst of it is that, when kindness has been literally forced on you, you are held bound to be grateful."

"To be friendly, at least—grateful is too strong a word?"

"I accept the amendment," said Escott, smiling; "women are not usually such nice weighers of words; however, you will allow me to say, I am grateful to your son for getting me the Pyrola—that is a case, considering the fatigue and the real danger, which authorizes the word and the feeling. I should like to thank him. I trust he suffers no further ill effects from the adder's bite?"

"None at all, the swelling only lasted a couple of days."

"I was really astonished," went on Escott, "at his doing so much for me; I believe I was something rough with him the last time we met."

"Georgy is good-natured," said Mrs. Brown, quietly.

"I wish he would come and see me," said Escott, acted on by Mrs. Brown's reserve to be more expansive than ordinary—the potency of silence cannot be over-rated—it can drive a timid person into reckless incaution—it was under this sort of influence that Escott continued, "As he likes exercise, I should be glad if he would sometimes join me in my walks. I am not, perhaps, so amusing a companion as he might wish for, but I should be a safer one than some he has. You are not offended at my plain speaking."

"No, indeed, I feel all the kindness of your intention," replied Mrs. Brown; then, without taking her eyes off her work, she added,—“all the kinder that

I am aware there is much about George which must be displeasing to you. We often wonder at, and are repulsed by manners and habits, which would appear natural and inoffensive, did we know the peculiarities of circumstance or education from which they spring."

"Be the cause known or unknown," said Escott, "the effects remain the same, and it is with them we have to do."

However charmed with Mrs. Brown, and the unruffled soothing voice in which she spoke, Escott was not the man to accept vague excuses or explanations, blindfold.

Mrs. Brown glanced her eyes over his face; then again continuing to look at her work, she said in the same even tone, "True, the effects are the same, but our judgment of them might be modified. For instance, you are startled by George's wild ways, and at his associating familiarly with the children and young people of the village. But he has been brought up in the country abroad, where manners are much more democratic than anywhere in England; and from a child he has been used to play with the children of peasants. Indeed, the whole social atmosphere on the Continent, where he has always lived, is so different from that in our own country, as to account for much that perhaps appears strange here."

"For some things certainly," said Escott, "but ——" he hesitated, as if seeking the least offensive form in which to clothe his meaning.

Mrs. Brown spoke at once, as though she desired to anticipate the objection trembling on the curate's lips. She said with a shade more of decision in her

gentle tone, "As for some other singularities which my explanation may not include, I am not sorry of an opportunity to say thus much. My poor child's health till very lately never allowed of any kind of discipline being used; hence, even now, in spite of an excellent heart, he is subject to fits of frequent caprice and wilfulness. Then again," here Mrs. Brown's cheek flushed slightly, though her voice was as calm as before, "George's father had some peculiar opinions respecting education; among others, he held especially, that no form of worship, no particular religious persuasion should be inculcated during childhood. He thought that the subject of religion should be reserved for that age when the human being could bring developed faculties to the consideration of so serious a question as the choice of a creed."

"An exaggeration of even Rousseau's views," said Escott, with indignation.

"Such were the influences and ideas of George's early years," continued Mrs. Brown tranquilly, and without noticing Escott's remark. And having said this much, without waiting for any rejoinder, she abruptly changed the conversation by asking, "if Miss Greatorrex was fond of botany."

Escott had no right to force Mrs. Brown into further revelations or discussions of her son or his father, so he followed her lead, and Mrs. Brown being herself a tolerable botanist, and having at hand some rare specimens of the flora of Switzerland and Germany, he was speedily taking an interesting ride on his hobby-horse. It was not till Hans opened the drawing-room door that Escott remembered to look

at his watch, and to apologize for his unconscionably long visit. "Dinner is on the table," said Mrs. Brown; "if you are not afraid of very simple fare, I think you had better stay and dine with us—you look as if you wanted your dinner."

Escott hesitated a little, then confessed that he did feel greatly in want of food, and frankly accepted the invitation. Hans took him upstairs to wash his hands: when he returned to the sitting-room he found George there, in a shy mood; for he made no answer to Escott's thanks for the flower, and was silent during dinner. The dinner, by the way, merited in every sense the term simple; bread-soup, cold beef, and a salad, with a German pudding hastily concocted by Hans while the meat was on the table; no wine, only beer. Mrs. Brown made no apologies for the deficiencies of her table, but Escott fancied by the way she brought George into the conversation that she was anxious to cover the lad's taciturnity.

"George tells me," said she, "that when he was on Bishop's Common to-day, he saw, for the first time, a hovel literally built of mud, and thatched with nettles. The house was in fact scooped out of a bank, he would never have seen it, but for a paper stuck over the door, on which was written, 'Mud Castle.' He says, when he went in, there was a crowd of children all in a heap, looking like a set of half-starved little birds, and the father an old man almost bent double, crouching over the fire. Do you know anything of these people?"

"Yes, they are quite respectable. Hagar is a hard-working man, he is said to be even now the

best mower in the parish—he has a good clever wife, who declares she and her husband have never had a mis-word since they married—but, nevertheless, they have found it impossible to fill the mouths of such a number of children as they have, and Hagar was at last reduced to such straits as to have to send his wife and children into the union. He would not go into the house himself, and it seems he built this same hovel and now has brought his family to what in irony, he calls, Mud Castle. Though he looks decrepit, he is only a middle-aged man.”

“He looks as though he were seventy,” put in George.

“A sad picture,” said Mrs. Brown, “and one I should hardly have expected to find here; for this place has hitherto struck me as cheeringly prosperous, free from indigence.”

Escott looked pleased. “Yes,” he replied, “we have very few families oppressed by poverty. It was different, when Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex came here—no schools, no clothing clubs—no regular church service, for the living then belonged to a pluralist; the present rector and his family have, I may say, civilized the parish, and rendered it as you so well describe it, cheeringly prosperous—yet, even here, we dare not boast that no destitution exists.”

“Surely,” said Mrs. Brown thoughtfully, “there must be something wrong in a state of society which can reduce an honest, hard-working man, like this Hagar, to put away his family from him, because he cannot with all his efforts earn wherewithal to keep them from starvation.”

"I think," returned Escott, "that his is one of those individual cases on which we can scarcely build a theory. Most frequently destitution arises from ill-conduct, and that again from the not having had sound religious principles early instilled."

"Yet," persisted Mrs. Brown, "we have many instances where poverty, and not innate viciousness drives a man into evil ways—how many, whose first theft has been caused by starvation?"

Escott said testily, as a man does, who is not used to contradiction from a woman,—“We are arguing in a vicious circle.”

"I am not arguing," replied Mrs. Brown gently; "I am only feeling."

"It is dangerous to allow our feelings to guide us into raising questions, which, pushed to their logical conclusions, are calculated to shake society to its foundation," said Escott. "In the feeling you have just expressed, lies the germ of socialism and all its dangers."

"That is a ground I will not break," said the hostess. "Shall we go to the drawing-room?"

There was no wine, therefore no reason why the curate should not follow the lady. While they were taking some excellent black coffee, Escott said in a livelier tone,—“For all we look so quiet in Eden, we have some romances in real life of our own. I don't know if you have ever noticed a pretty, rather elegant-looking woman, the wife of the baker who lives on the hill?”

"Yes, I have noticed her," said Mrs. Brown.

"Well, there is this report current about her, that she was married very young to some man she met

when on her first visit to London; that within six months of her marriage this husband disappeared—that she has never been able to trace him—never has known what became of him. It appears that she waited some years, and then married the baker Jonathan Gilbert, and what is the strangest of all, never seems troubled by any misgivings of her first husband's turning up, and the possible consequences to her.

“And what would they be?” asked Mrs. Brown.

“I don't exactly know, whether there is a legal term for a man or woman's patience in waiting for their lost partner—but the law I believe is more lenient to a woman than to a man who commits bigamy. Mrs. Gilbert's case surely would be treated lightly—for she has been more sinned against than sinning. It is not like a case where a woman's happiness has been wrecked.”

“George,” said Mrs. Brown, “Mr. Escott is very fond of music, go and play.”

It was past eleven when the curate left the Hatch. His feelings were mixed ones as he pursued his way to his lodgings; he had been pleased, displeased, then pleased again. Pleasure being the last emotion, was uppermost, and he was inclined to be merciful in his judgment of mother and son.

“They have accepted shining fallacies for truth,” mused he. “She has acquiesced in them because she was attached to the person who uttered them, the origin of most women's convictions—as for the poor boy, the grain of millet has been given to him instead of the diamond.”

The more Escott thought, the more impelled he felt to take some steps to bring Dodge to an understanding of the truth. It was a duty that lay straight in his path as a minister of the gospel; he must neither shirk it from personal disinclination, nor blink it out of deference to the opinions of the father, as quoted by Mrs. Brown. And with this resolution Escott laid his head upon his pillow, and “sleep covered him with its cloak.”



CHAPTER IX.

“THE LITTLE RIFT.”

Escott had gone to sleep with the best intentions. Let none of us however depend on the goodness of our intentions for keeping us clear of trouble or blame. Even should they not turn to paving stones down below, they are apt to form a very rough road for us here above. If our actions admit of two suppositions, we must submit to the necessity of the least pleasant being the one accepted and adopted; people always do, whatever the matter in doubt, be it love or war, or fortune or travelling, make choice of the most disagreeable hypothesis to dwell upon. And of all those who despair most of mankind's rectitude, who see naught but vanity and vexation in their neighbours' doings, commend me to a country gossip, male or female. It's no business of his or hers, and yet see, what watchings by day and by night—what wearied limbs and senses belong to such an individual.

His or her inquisitive mind forces its way, even where eyes cannot see, or ears hear.

Eden would not have been complete without its gossip, and it possessed a rare one. Before ten o'clock the next morning, Maud knew that Mr. Escott had entered the Hatch at half-past four the day before, and remained there until within an hour of midnight; knew that Mr. Escott had greatly enjoyed himself, and walked back as brisk as needs be to his lodgings—quite another man, one might say, to what he had been in the morning. Bits out of real life sound strangely exaggerated to inexperienced or unobserving persons—and yet who so happy as never to have heard that formula, “It is said.”

Maud hearing this agreeable account of her betrothed's health, had a sudden curious qualm; it was just as if a black something had been held before her eyes, shutting out the blessed light of day. Some instinct, as strong as that of self-preservation in women, helped her to maintain a show of calmness so long as she was face to face with her informant. She withstood the strange and new sensation which made her long to throw aside the work she was at that particular instant preparing for the school children, and which was indeed certain items of her trousseau. Maud had begun her preparations betimes, as she wished that every article that could be made in Eden should be made in Eden; it would be pleasant to think hereafter, that all that beautiful hemming and stitching had been done for her by friendly fingers.

At last the gossip had carried away the cambric

and lawn, and Maud might follow her inclination. She hid herself in her own room ; if Maud had done wrong herself, she could not have been more anxious to hide. She was sore and sad, she said in her heart ; “ that to be with him at any time, still more so, when they had been a fortnight separated, she would not have minded the noise of forty children, or the bustle of the General Post Office at six in the evening.” Maud somehow thought of a picture she had seen representing that peculiar scene. Very odd combinations of memory and ideas crowd upon one in moments of trouble. Then arose an ardent desire that no one else in the house should know that Escott had dined at the Hatch, after refusing to do so at the rectory. We can better bear a grief to be handled than a wound to our self-love ; so sincere was this feeling in Maud that she at last came to the decision that she should not herself much mind the crime, so that no one else was aware it had been committed.

While thus cogitating, a little pebble struck her window ; she was pretty certain whose hand had thrown it : and suddenly she had her first, very first impulse to *boulder*. Another pebble, hitting harder Maud got up from her chair, opened the window and made a poor show of not guessing who had taken the liberty of claiming her attention so unceremoniously. Escott looked up, and waved to her to come down, with the imperial gesture of a man who knows he is despotic monarch of the heart of the young lady at the window. He had made his own reflections that morning, and felt that Maud and her family had some

right to find fault with him, if they should hear that, refusing their invitation, he had afterwards accepted one from Mrs. Brown. Escott so reflecting, had set off to go and tell his own tale, and confess to Maud that he was too apt to let trifles put him out of sorts.

Escott and Maud had never had any of those "fallings out" which are the *dulcamara* of courtship; yet Maud began this first one, as well as the greatest adept could have done. She walked majestically down the stairs; slowly, to the very last step, in spite of innocent Carry's hastening cry of, "Maud, Maud, don't you know? Walter is in the garden!"

Instead of the little hurrying trot that had not an atom of dignity in it, this day Maud went to meet the curate with a full recollection of how to manage the goose-step so insisted on by drill sergeant Paterson—very upright she was, and in her slimness and her audacious disregard of a hoop, looking wonderfully like the figure of the girl in Millais' picture of the Huguenot; her eyes though were not raised full of unspeakable love to the waiting lover.

Escott understood what had happened; he thought he had never seen Maud look so piquant; it was his turn this morning to hasten to her. Had the smoothness of his course of love palled on him, that Maud's pouting so reanimated him? well, everything in nature shows a distaste of monotony; not two leaves on a tree alike—not the sky of two following days.

"Maud!" he exclaimed, taking both her hands in his; she did not withdraw the pretty little dimpled hands, but she let them lie passively in his, as well as if she had done the same a hundred times before.

But the voice of one who is loved is as potent over a heart as Joshua's trumpet over the walls of Jericho: three times Escott said, “Maud!” smiling inwardly at the way the wavering colour in her cheek, and the obstinately downcast lid, betrayed that she was all but conquered. At the third summons she looked up; he met her eyes, and watched the coming back into them, of all their usual joy and tenderness at sight of him. When he had seen that, he said, “Now, I insist on plenary absolution before confession. I am very generous in thus insisting, for otherwise you would have no merit.”

“But I have made no accusation,” began Maud, true to her sex, who cannot forgive half so well when asked as unasked.

“No accusation!” repeated Escott; “eyes, lips, feet, from the top of this little head to the sole of that little foot, you were one formal accusation against Walter Escott. H'm! hasn't the second curate been here this morning?” Second curate was the name John Earl had given to that wide-awake person, who overlooked the spiritual and temporal goings on of the Edenites. “And didn't she tell you how this your prisoner,” and Escott put his arm within Maud's, and walked her off across the lawn, through the golden sunshine to a more discreet distance from the rectory windows, “how this your prisoner dared to appease his hunger at the Hatch after saying you, nay?”

“It was so silly of me,” said Maud, viewing the matter with her arm squeezed against Escott's heart, quite differently from when she was having that dis-

agreeable *tête-à-tête* with herself in her own room. "Well! I shall not dispute my judge's sentence," said Escott, resuming his supremacy; "and now that you are not angry ——"

"Oh! Walter," she interrupted, "angry is going too far."

"What shall I call the feeling that made you hold up your head so becomingly?"

Maud said it was "only being a little put out," not anger, nor anything near anger; she protested she did not want, she did not wish, she could not bear explanations—"pray don't, Walter, or I shall believe you think me very mean and foolish."

"A truce to explanation, then," as if he were very magnanimous; it is always so; the position the one general retires from the other takes up. "But you won't refuse to hear my story." And Escott most conscientiously related how and why he had called at the Hatch; how, being tired, he had lazily sat on; how Mrs. Brown had not taken any pains to entertain him—he dwelt on that point;—and how, when the old German had announced dinner, he had been so surprised it seemed almost a necessity that he should stay. He added that he had made an excellent dinner, and should have left early but for that odd boy. "He must be a musical genius—his playing works on my feelings in a way no other music ever did. He makes the piano sing."

"What did he play? Beethoven? That's the most difficult of all to play well," said Maud, whose idea of fine playing was the doing of that which she herself could not accomplish.

“He did not say; but whoever the composer, I know now that music has a language transcending any I ever heard spoken.” Escott was a little while silent, his own words had recalled some of the sounds which had so charmed him the night before and some also of his own sensations. He started when Maud asked,—“And what do you think of Mrs. Brown?”

“What I suppose every one must think—that she is beautiful, well-educated, and agreeable.”

“Did she say anything which made you understand why they came here?”

“Not a word. After all, probably the reason she gave or implied to your mother is the true one—the health of her son.”

“Then you are now reconciled to Mrs. Brown?” said Maud, in a half-questioning tone.

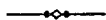
“I have not yet made up my mind,” he answered smiling; “she is ladylike and pleasant as I said before, and she has a charm one finds in few men or women: she speaks more of things than of persons. By-and-by, Maud, that’s one of the rules we’ll make and keep in our house.”

Maud’s answer sounded as if she had no wish to follow Mrs. Brown’s example. “That would be difficult in a clergyman’s house, Walter.”

“We’ll have special hours then for sitting in judgment, and after that—a forfeit for every name that is named.”

Reconciliations show us the love that is in our own and others’ hearts much as a magic lantern does the picture which it projects on a wall—making it seem for a moment larger and brighter than the

reality. Reconciliations are pleasant certainly—yet they have a bitter source, and sometimes the after-taste smacks more of the origin than of the offspring. Let us see what Maud's sip of the *dulcamara* of peace-making did for her. It taught her no longer to go through the day placidly; able to give her whole interest to the book she was reading, or the flowers she was cultivating, happy when *he* came, not unhappy when he went, knowing that the morrow would bring him back. But now, often she did not understand what she read, or hear what was said to her; she grew breathless for his coming, as one who doubts and fears. Maud's heart had been as tranquil as an unruffled lake—it was no longer a clear mirror; it was all rippling now with wavelets of quickened feelings.



CHAPTER X.

ONE TALE IS GOOD TILL ANOTHER'S TOLD.

EDEN, in these pages, has appeared as entirely cut off from general society, save for the infirm tipsy old postman, as though it had been surrounded by the four great rivers of its namesake. The Greatorexes, Mrs. Lescrimière, Mrs. Brown, Dodge and Estcott, and back again, Escott, Dodge, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Lescrimière and the Greatorexes—a gossip, and a family living in a Mud Castle; just as if neither carriages nor saddle-horses ever entered the rectory gates; as if there were no dinners given or gone to; when all the while, the whole sequence of social

amenities and properties were observed by the Greatorexes and their neighbours.

Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale, the couple from Australia were the nearest of these to Eden, and people who live within a certain distance of each other in the country, are always intimate till they quarrel. Thus though the Greatorexes quizzed the family from the colonies, and these last returned the compliment by laughing at French airs and graces, each party allowed the other some good qualities, and since the Hatch was let, the intimacy had redoubled. For Mrs. Lonsdale was as curious as Mrs. Greatorex as to Mrs. Brown and her son. There was not indeed a hypothesis applicable to a woman and a boy, that Mrs. Lonsdale had not put forward, and seriously speaking without any ill-will to the objects of her doubts. Once she ventured on an act unparalleled since she became a wife—startled her husband out of his evening's slumbers by exclaiming, "I am sure this must be meant for Mrs. Brown." And she read from the second column of the first page of *The Times*, "Q—in the corner.—All safe. Forget me not."

"What has that to do with Mrs. Brown?" asked Mr. Lonsdale, querulously.

"Q—in the corner! I am sure she is in a corner."

Mr. Lonsdale muttered something not polite, and went to sleep again.

Another time, Mrs. Lonsdale guessed that Mrs. Brown was the famous L— M— waiting to return to Munich, and she wanted to send a groom over to offer to the supposed exile her own saddle-horse, not up to her weight now. Then she remembered that

Mrs. Brown had a son instead of a notoriously large dog, so that supposition had to be renounced.

At first Mrs. Lonsdale's conjectures had amused her friends at the rectory, they were simply preposterous; but she, growing tired of unsuccess, broke forth one day into moralizing on the subject, and of all people in the world chose Mrs. Lescrimière for auditor.

"There must be something wrong, you know," began Mrs. Lonsdale, "wherever there's concealment, there must be wickedness. Every one agrees to that."

"Whatever everybody agrees to must be a lie," retorted Mrs. Lescrimière, "what truth has ever been universally acknowledged? Can you tell me, Mrs. Lonsdale?"

"Oh! that's another matter, you know," said Mrs. Lonsdale, her colour deepened by fear of Mrs. Lescrimière. "I don't pretend to be wiser than other people, but Mr. Lonsdale always says that right can bear sunlight."

"Truth, however, you may tell him, lies at the bottom of a well, and has successfully concealed herself since the beginning of the world," said Mrs. Lescrimière.

This skirmish silenced Mrs. Lonsdale's question of "Who can she be?" for a considerable time.

There were other potentates on the frontiers of Eden who troubled themselves about Mrs. Brown's antecedents. Now, why should people who would not have condescended to enter Mrs. Brown's doors, think about her at all—gratuitously talk scandal about her? They had no other reason to give, except that she had

not chosen to publish her history for their curiosity to batten on.

Well, then, the whole gamut of accusations had been run down, sotto voce, alta voce, and then suddenly popular opinion veered round. Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex having called at the Hatch, were bound to defend their having done so; and this they did by testifying to circumstantial evidence in Mrs. Brown's favour. Mr. Escott's opinion—he having the reputation of being difficult to please—had double the weight of that of the good-natured rector and his wife. He declared he had discovered no cause of accusation against Mrs. Brown. As for Mrs. Lescrimière her word went for just nothing. Charity has only theoretically a wider sphere of influence and justice.

The ascending scale is far more difficult than the descending one. Catalani said so. The decision applies to more things than the voice. To bowl down hill is easy—*facilis descensus Averni*, &c., but starting from the Greatorex's tea-party, the gamut of suppositions in favour of Mrs. Brown was slowly run up—and one of the first consequences was that Mrs. Lonsdale went in her handsome new carriage to call on the once supposed Q—in the corner. The heart of the lady from Australia, as she drove along, was full of some of that spirit of adventure which had expanded it, when some score of years ago she had sailed across the ocean, a bride. She intended to patronize as well as scrutinize her new acquaintance.

Mrs. Brown was perfectly courteous to her unexpected visitor; so polished indeed that every effort

at elucidation or discovery made by Mrs. Lonsdale, slipped aside.

Mrs. Lonsdale began:—"You must find Eden very dull. Did you expect it to be as quiet and as onely as it is?"

Mrs. Brown had been aware of the fact that the Hatch was situated in a very secluded village.

"The Greatorexes must be a great resource to you," went on Mrs. Lonsdale; "it's a great comfort to them to have a decent tenant at the Hatch—not been always so; it makes a great difference to them. The last people here were troublesome; old Miss Earl, John Earl's sister, called them, 'rebellious ladies.'"

"Indeed!" Mrs. Brown had not heard anything of her predecessors.

"I am sure I wonder how such a house lets at all," said Mrs. Lonsdale. "I should be afraid to live in it without a gentleman. When Mr. Lonsdale's away for a night I always make my maid sleep in the dressing-room with the door open between us; to hear some one breathing gives courage, you know."

Mrs. Brown was not nervous, and was a good sleeper.

"Lucky woman that you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Lonsdale, warming up into her own gossiping self; "but then your nerves haven't been tried like mine, out in Australia, you know; there wouldn't be a nerve in your body worth having if you had lived the best years of your life with your heart in your mouth."

A chance shot often hits the mark; but Mrs. Lonsdale, without observing either the smile or the

sigh with which Mrs. Brown had received her assertion, went on,—

“And your son, what does he do to amuse himself? He is a good player I know, but music is not enough for a boy. I hear *our* curate says he is too fond of running about. Do you like Mr. Escott? Folks not a hundred miles off think a mighty deal of him; he is one of the Escotts of Escott, only a younger son, though he gives himself the airs of a lord; but between you and me he is a horrid muff.”

As Mrs. Lonsdale paused, expecting some reply, Mrs. Brown, who had no distinct idea how Mr. Escott could be a muff, thought it safest to say she had only twice been in company with the curate.

“He’s to marry Miss Greatorex,” said Mrs. Lonsdale.

People’s words have often more than one meaning—Mrs. Brown must have understood, or else she was very obtuse, that Mrs. Lonsdale pitied Miss Greatorex for marrying Mr. Escott. Mrs. Lonsdale could not have given any other reason for her pity, save that she herself would not have liked to marry Mr. Escott. Though she called him “a muff,” she had no ill-will towards him; it even flattered her when he talked to her. Mrs. Lonsdale’s eyes were as busy as her tongue—she was setting down in her memory, that Mrs. Brown’s collar and sleeves were “lovely;” perfectly absurd the wearing them at home in such a place as Eden, with no one to see them, for Mrs. Brown couldn’t have guessed *she* was going to call.

The fox who had lost his own tail made an oration

to his brethren to cut off theirs. Mrs. Lonsdale spoke to her acquaintances of Mrs. Brown; she had been to the Hatch, and she was glad she had been. Mrs. Brown was very pleasant, lady-like, and her devotion to her son was really very touching. Some of the lesser lights of twenty miles round, the one following the other, called on Mrs. Brown. There was the family who sat an hour without speaking; another who all spoke at once—there were some courteous, some brusque, all curious, and all hospitably inclined.

Mrs. Brown at first refused all invitations, but kindness is difficult to resist, and when a friendly note came asking her to spend a quiet evening, accompanied by the promise of sending the pony-chaise or carriage to fetch her, she went, though with evident reluctance. She was so unassuming, that the ladies liked her, so handsome that the gentlemen could not but admire her; they talked to her (men generally do to pretty women) and found that, in spite of the beauty of her features and complexion, she was a sensible, accomplished woman.

Escott enjoyed her conversation more perhaps than any of his elder confrères; the key to the stores of his mind had not yet rusted in the lock, for want of use. Mrs. Lonsdale had a way of her own of viewing Escott's pleasure in Mrs. Brown's conversation. She had rigid notions of an engaged young lady's duties and rights, and very rigid ideas as to those of a lover. She felt for Maud on such occasions as she would have felt for herself; and in her sympathy at last whispered to that young lady, "If

I were you, I would not permit it, not I. I advise you, my dear, not to be so intimate with Mrs. Brown; women of that age are so deep. I know them." Maud's eyes dilated. "I don't mean anything," continued Mrs. Iago; "it's all friendship I know, only my opinion is, and it was my mamma's before me, that a husband should have no lady friends, not if they were even grandmothers. Mr. Lonsdale never dared to talk to any lady but me after we were engaged. No, no; no interlopers for me—" a pause; then, "what beautiful eyes she has, and she knows it." A deep-felt indignation emphasized Mrs. Lonsdale's sentence.

Maud could not help looking with curiosity at Mrs. Brown and the curate. Certainly it was with decided admiration that Escott was regarding his fair companion; he would not have been a man had he done otherwise; but there was not a thought in his mind that could have offended Maud. Mixing with his admiration was a sort of wondering compassion that the beautiful gifted creature talking to him, should be more like a neglected weed, than the carefully cherished flower of some manly heart, as it seemed natural to expect.

But what is to be said of Mrs. Lonsdale or any such, who sows the first suspicion in a youthful mind? Oh! if we would only avoid silliness as sedulously as poverty. We hear it said by way of defence, for having a foolish acquaintance, "she is silly, but there's no harm in her." Perhaps not, but a great deal of danger. There's a monstrous difference between a probe in skilful or unskilful hands: at any

rate let us remember, that "He who licks honey from thorns will pay for it," and that, "The ass often treads down the most beautiful flowers."

Mrs. Lonsdale's stupid remarks did not apparently produce any effect on Maud, but they had nevertheless sunk into her mind. At the moment, she answered, "Yes, Mrs. Brown has fine eyes: Dodge's are larger and brighter, sometimes painfully bright."

Mrs. Lonsdale, tapping her own forehead significantly, said, "Your mother thinks there is something wrong here. Where is he this evening?"

"He will never come to us, if there's to be anybody besides ourselves; because then he won't see my sister Carry, the only one of us he cares much for: he grows shyer every day," said Maud.

"His mother lets him have too much of his own way," said Mrs. Lonsdale.

"I think she is afraid of drawing people's attention to his oddities," pleaded Maud.

"She's a poor spiritless thing in my opinion, the sort of lackadaisical doll men admire—does nothing all day that I can find out, but read and work."

Maud's account of George was exact—he refused every invitation, would not even take a bachelor's dinner with Escott, who repeatedly and with intention invited him. Indeed George went to no gentleman's house except to the rectory, and there only when there was no company. Mrs. Greatorox had taken him to task for his want of good nature with his music, but failed, after that first evening when he had played for her unamusable guests, ever to make him yield a second time. He laughed at

all her reasons, and told her he didn't mean to put on a coat for many a year, and perhaps never, and that in his velvet tunic he should be taken for a showman or strolling player; no, he would come and play as often as she liked when they were alone, but he neither could nor would in a party. He hated all he had heard of parties; his mother said they were insipid plays acted by stupid actors; that every one was delighted when the curtain dropped, and they were at liberty to say, "They had been nearly suffocated by trying not to yawn."

"Then your mother used to go to parties?" asked Mrs. Greatorrex promptly.

"She must," said George with a great appearance of naïveté, "for she hates them."

"You don't, then, remember her being so gay?" persisted Mrs. Greatorrex.

"It was when I was a child, I don't know anything about it."

Mrs. Greatorrex clung obstinately to her idea of George being of unsound mind; she always called him, "poor Dodge," and petted him, in spite of his resistance. It must be owned that he bore with the same equanimity—being quizzed by the children, coaxed or lectured by the elders, excepting indeed a word of reproof or satire from Escott. Then his eyes would flash and his nostrils dilate, and his whole look would be that of mad helpless passion. One evening in particular, at the rectory, when Escott, to retaliate some slight of Dodge's to Maud, had been peculiarly sharp to him, Dodge had suddenly burst into tears and rushed out of the house.

Escott as he was going home an hour afterwards caught sight of the short figure in a blouse sitting disconsolately on a gate by the roadside. "Come here, youngster," cried the curate, "while I give you a lesson you ought to have learned before this. Don't you know that it is a man's duty to behave courteously to women?"

"I am not a man," said Dodge sulkily.

"You are old enough, however," retorted Escott, "not to be treated as one would treat a child like Charles Greatorex, had he behaved as you have done to-night, and indeed on many other occasions, to Miss Greatorex. She is invariably kind to you, forbearing to a fault, and you almost always treat her with rough indifference. I will not describe your manner by another name, because I am unwilling to think you have a bad heart."

"I cannot pretend to like where I do not," answered Dodge sullenly.

"You ought to be ashamed of such an avowal with regard to one of God's best creatures," said Escott hotly.

There came no reply, and Escott, whose temper was ruffled first by the incident itself, and then by Dodge's obstinacy, hurried on without saying good-night. Escott was by no means an attentive lover; he was reserved to an error, in all outward shows of tenderness, yet it was scarcely possible to anger him more than by any oversight or unkindness to Maud. Before he reached his lodgings his ire had cooled, and he reproached himself for not having made use of this chance meeting to say *that* to young

Brown which he had tried to make an opportunity for saying, by inviting him to dinner. And then Escott fell to speculating as to how so charming a mother could have so wilful a child. He was unwilling to be very hard on so agreeable a lady. He had never before found any difficulty in deciding as to what he thought of his acquaintances, and he had hitherto never liked any one without being certain that he also esteemed. Now, he did undoubtedly like Mrs. Brown, nay, he felt ready to do her any service in his power, yet really, except so far as her beauty, manners, and conversation went, he knew no good of her. Pious she assuredly was not, as he comprehended the word, and as a mother, visibly careless. Might he not venture to give her a hint or two on this last point? No, on further consideration, he would stick to his first plan of speaking to the youth himself.



CHAPTER XI.

WOE TO THE CONQUERED.

THE leaves were yellow as gold on the tall poplars in the avenue leading to the Castle Hill, when Escott one day overtook George Brown there; they had not met for a week, not since the night of the fracas noticed in the last chapter. The curate held out his hand in token of renewed amity, saying,—

“I am going over the hill to Bowick, will you walk with me?” George hesitated. My good boy,”

went on Escott, "you must get rid as fast as you can of the childish habit of sulking; in going through the world you must learn to take as well as to give; if you offend, you must be ready to meet the consequences. If I was too harsh to you the other evening, the circumstances were aggravating. Let bygones be bygones; come along with me. I want your company particularly to-day." George still hung his head, but kept by the curate's side. Escott was a first-rate walker, and urged by a sharp wind he stepped out smartly. Pursuing the same idea, he said, "Had you ever been to a public school, all nonsense would have been taken out of you long ago. You must try now and do that for yourself; ah! I see I am going too fast for your short legs."

They were at that moment crossing "Eden Roughs;" the ground was pierced in every direction with rabbit-holes; little grey-looking lumps with white scuts, bounded into life as the walkers came near, burrowing into the earth, or vanishing into the brake, with all the celerity of terror. "Fine fun for Master Charles Greateorex and his ferret here," began George, without any appearance of having heard what the curate had been saying to him.

"I wonder you do not sometimes go out with Charlie," said Escott; "he is not so old as you are, but he is an intelligent little fellow, and in my opinion a more suitable companion for your walks than some you choose."

"Perhaps, but not so agreeable," retorted George, with a most provokingly saucy air and smile.

Escott, who had been seeking how most kindly to introduce the subject on which he wished to give advice, lost his patience and said sharply, "Foreign habits won't answer here. I am afraid you are far from being a good boy."

George turned a face bubbling over with mischievous glee on his mentor, and asked, "What makes you think so ill of me, Mr. Escott? Pray explain what evil foreign habits I have imported into Eden?"

Escott had a temper that never brooked being defied; he knew his fault and to keep it in check was a daily discipline. He recovered his self-control in the minute George took to ask this question, and answered with calmness, "I allude to your constant practice of seeking the company of the young girls of the village; it is an odd taste in a young gentleman who might have the society of his equals."

"Ah! the foreign habit you denounce," said George, interrupting Escott, "is, that I don't show a sufficient sense of my own superiority. You see I have not had the advantage of being brought up in England. Where we lived before we came here, I was taught to treat the villagers as if they were of the same clay as myself. *Que voulez-vous?* It is my misfortune not my fault, the not having more respectable ways." All merriment had left George's face, and Escott was struck by a haughtiness not without grace in the air of the boy's whole person. He looked like a little prince rebuking some forward subject. They walked on for some few minutes in silence.

“You were a child then,” recommenced Escott; “it is high time to give up childish habits when they can no longer be innocent or un hurtful. Do you never think seriously on *any* subject, never think of how best to employ your youth?”

“No, never; soon enough to do that when necessity forces me to do so, if that should ever be.”

“I have no right to advise you as to the future,” said Escott; “you have your mother and doubtless other friends to counsel you. I will only bid you remember that a youth of idleness is father to a maturity of weariness.”

They were passing along the brow of the hill and Escott broke off his speech to gaze on the lovely landscape often seen, never wearied of. Down below them in front lay a long plain lit up by the sun to look like gold with a border of emeralds; beyond that again, the sparkling restless sea. To their right, all in shade, a narrow valley with a grey church on which lay the weight of eight centuries. It had been rifled of its pictures, its relics, and its jewels; its chapels desecrated, most of the brasses inlaying the pavement of the nave and aisles torn up; but the worst Vandalism of all, which had no great, if mistaken, cause in view, occurred in our own times. Its churchwardens made a bargain with a glazier of Z—— to take in exchange for furnishing the church with new windows, the remnants of rich painted glass that had escaped the fury of religious opinions, and which the Bowick burgraves thought had a shabby look.

The sunk road down to Bowick was cut through

chalk banks, with a layer at top of yellow brown earth, over which hung a fringe of long grass, with here and there a stunted thornbush, from whence came a robin's song. The barren solitude of the hill made the blue smoke curling from the roofs of the houses below look more cheerful and inviting. On one side of the battered old church were conspicuous three Scotch firs—the centre one, the tallest. Facing the Lichgate was a long low building.

As Escott left the Downs for the road, he said, "I don't think you know the Huttons, do you? The family who live where those three firs are?"

George knew them only by name.

"Those three trees," went on the curate, "represent the three sons. Mr. Hutton planted one at each of their births. The middle one, called Harry's tree—that is the second son's—has, as you see, out-topped the other two; he was a peculiarly handsome child, and a gipsy predicted he would be the one to raise the family, and the extra growth of the fir seemed to his father a sort of confirmation of the prediction. The prophecy will bring about its own fulfilment. In the first place Henry was sent to the London University, instead of being allowed to finish his education at a country school, and having a good memory and not overmuch of reflection, he passed creditable examinations. Besides this, he was a pleasant fellow, always agreeing with his company for the time being; and thus he made friends, and the end of it was, that a father of one of his chums took him into his counting-house, with the promise of finding something good for him

by-and-by. That occurred some two years ago, when Henry was seventeen. The something good came this spring, and the young man sailed three months ago for Hong Kong. He begins at nineteen with a salary of five hundred a year. The whole Hutton family are happy and proud. The father points to Henry's tree with faith in its promise. I saw Henry Hutton before he sailed. I never saw a human face with more of the satisfaction of well-earned success in it. His employer says (and Mr. Hutton will tell you so every time he sees you), that he never had so exemplary a lad in his office. Like you, he did not seem to acknowledge any differences of rank. He was very affable, very sociable, mixing freely with those not of his own station. I will give you the sequel of his story as we go home. I have a visit to pay here." And Escott stopped at the foot of a short flight of stone steps which led up to the wicket of a small garden in front of the long low building, opposite to the Lichgate of the church.

"Pray come in with me," continued Escott to George. "I shall not detain you long."

George followed Escott along the path between gooseberry bushes up to the door of *the* shop of Bowick. The window on one side displayed a heterogeneous store of articles, a segment of rich plum-cake was side by side with men's braces and horn buttons, cheese and pattens lay cheek by jowl, caps with artificial flowers were supported by soap and candles. A painful look of disorder pervaded the whole show.

The door opened with the usual sharp tingle of a bell, and Escott and his companion entering, found

Mrs. Wood behind her counter weighing out one ounce of tea and two of sugar to a young country-woman. Very visible were the traces of tears that had been rolling over Mrs. Wood's not very clean face; she was nevertheless sharply watching that she did not give one leaf of tea or grain of sugar more than was due.

"Your pleasure, sir?" she said, turning to Escott.

"I am Mr. Escott from Eden. I heard that your daughter, Charity, was much worse, and knowing that Mr. Tewson was ill, I came over thinking she might like to see me."

"Well, I don't know about it," said Mrs. Wood. "Mr. Tewson, he sent her some books, 'cause he couldn't come himself—the 'Black River' and some 'at same kind; but, poor soul, she can't make it out to read now, she's past that, and a'most past hearing."

"I am very sorry to hear it." Escott's voice showed he really was grieved. The mother felt the tone of sincere sympathy directly, and went on, "The doctor he have ordered her cod-liver oil, but she throws it up; and port wine, she can keep that down, it's the only thing keeps her alive. Lord! we thought she were gone two nights ago, and then she war better next day."

"If you were to try change of air," said Escott; "there need be no difficulty, you know, as to money."

Once more a tear rolled down each of Mrs. Wood's cheeks, which she wiped away with the back of her hand. "It ain't no use to trouble her, the doctor says."

Here George touched Escott's arm, and just a little

beyond an inner door was a girl, almost a spirit. Had she in spite of her deafness heard her mother's words. It seemed probable, from the vague look of fear in her large beautiful dark grey eyes, and the slight flush rising on her waxen cheeks. Her brown hair hung down the sides of her face in heavy curls; but for the indescribable look of coming death, she would have been still most lovely.

Escott held out his hand to her, and raising his voice, asked her if she would like him to read to her. She smiled, putting her hands to her ears.

"I will try," he said to Mrs. Wood. "May I go into your parlour with her?"

"Yes, you may if you like;" then she screamed out: "Betsy, here's parson Escott coming to read to Charity."

Escott, half compelling George to go with him, followed the sick girl into the parlour. A fine, full-formed young woman was sitting there, trimming a bonnet with white bugles and gold flowers; she scarcely looked at the new comers, but propped her sister up with pillows tenderly enough. The curate drew a low chair close to Charity's hard horsehair sofa. He took his Bible from his pocket and read to her,—prayed for her, and with her; his voice, always so full of melody, vibrating now with the sweetest and noblest feelings of a Christian man, was like the voice of an angel; his face glowed with the heavenly spirit filling his soul. Did Charity hear him? he couldn't be sure, for she didn't speak, but her eyes were fixed on his lips, as if eager to catch the words that were flowing so tenderly from them.

When he ceased, she took his hand and kissed it with all her strength, then searched his eyes with her own, as if seeking an answer to some dire question. He knelt down, and speaking slowly and distinctly, repeated a psalm to her, a great favourite with all country congregations, one, that, if she caught but one word of, she would be able to follow, for she must have learned it when a little child: "The Lord himself, the mighty Lord, vouchsafes to be my guide, the shepherd by whose constant care my wants are all supplied. In tender grass He makes me feed and gently there repose, then leads me to cool shades and where refreshing water flows. He does my wandering soul reclaim, and to His endless praise, instruct with humble zeal to walk in his most righteous ways. I pass the gloomy vale of death from fear and danger free, for there His aiding rod and staff defend and comfort me."

She smiled two or three times while he was reciting the lines: when he had done and rose to go away, she was sleeping with the smile on her lips. Betsy had dropped the gay bonnet and was sitting with her apron over her head.

Mrs. Wood was busy talking to a farmer-looking man as Escott and George re-entered the shop. She looked at the curate and said: "It's all right, I hope, sir?"

"I hope so," he answered, with emotion.

"She did never no more harm than a babby as I knows of," went on the mother; "still one can't know, and oh, Lord! poor child, poor child, I'd like to be sure, sir." Here she burst into a loud fit of crying.

Escott was about to say some comforting words, when the still sobbing woman called after her customer who at sight of her tears was leaving the shop. "I say, Tom. I'll speak to Wood about 'em lambs, they're pets like, an' *she* wouldn't bear 'em to go to the butcher."

Escott fairly ran out of the door.



CHAPTER XII.

TU QUOQUE.

Escott had been extremely moved by his interview with Charity Wood. The mere man's feelings dominated over those of the spiritual pastor. A generous indignation and a profound pity swelled his bosom; he felt as if he desired nothing so much as to meet the caitiff who had blighted the life of so sweet a flower; he felt in his arms the power of ten men. Yes, he longed, ardently, to have the opportunity of laying that fortunate young Mr. Henry Hutton without ceremony his full length on the ground. The curate's thin, well-cut nostrils quivered and opened with righteous scorn. As he walked hurriedly along, his footsteps made the hard soil ring again. All at once he became aware that George was looking at him. He grasped the young gentleman by the arm saying, in a husky voice,—

"I hope you have received a warning."

"A warning?" repeated George, with some timidity.

“Yes, a warning. I took you with me to the house we have just left, for the purpose of giving you a lesson. There, you have seen the effects of a youth—not older than you when he began—amusing himself with village girls. Mr. Henry Hutton considered Charity Wood of the same clay as himself as long as it suited him to do so, but it was a different story when fortune favoured him. I look upon a man who acts as he has acted, as worse than the midnight murdering thief: the one kills to gain what he perhaps needs; the other, in cold blood, bleeds his victim to death from a spirit of inquiry as to the value of his own attractions. Poor little thing!” and Escott’s voice broke, he let go George’s arm and drew his breath hard, as he breasted the hill.

Escott forgot George; he was full of his own emotion—forgot George, did not see that he was obliged almost to run, and very pale. Presently George exclaimed panting, “I cannot go so fast.”

Escott said, “I beg your pardon,” and stopped, astonished and not a little perplexed by the expression of the boy’s eyes; he had seen them sparkling with fun or flashing with anger, grave with displeasure, but now they were fixed on himself beaming with such an ecstasy of devotion, that Escott gazed back for an instant confused.

Then returning to his first purpose he said, “George Brown, I will speak plainly to you. Tongues have wagged pretty freely about your conduct lately; your name has been coupled with that of Jemima White and Susan Deane. It is my duty to warn you, chide you, point out to you all the evil

consequences you will eventually bring on yourself ; a boy of sixteen is not a child."

"I have done no harm," began George, and then burst into what was neither a laugh nor a cry, but a mixture of both,—long repressed feeling and a sudden sense of something absurd, produced what we should call in a girl, a slight fit of hysterics.

Escott turned away in disgust.

"Don't leave me so, Mr. Escott," cried George, running after the curate. "I really am very sorry I laughed ; it was not at your advice, I assure you ; indeed, it was not. I promise I never will walk or talk beyond what common civility requires, with any of the girls again. I will not indeed."

"I hope you will keep your promise," said Escott, ungraciously, for he saw that George had to put his handkerchief to his mouth to hide a laugh.

"I have done good not harm to Jemima," went on George. "She and Eben have made up their quarrel, and you will have to marry them soon. I made Eben half mad with jealousy ; I did it on purpose."

"We should never do evil that good may come of it," returned Escott very grimly.

"You have always thought ill of me—hated me, Mr. Escott," said George reproachfully ; "and yet you do not know any real harm of me. I believe it is my whistling and laughing offends you. Why don't you hate the birds for singing, instead of liking and praising them ; it's not goodness makes them warble so sweetly, it's their nature. It's not badness makes me laugh, it's *my* nature." The boy's voice died away in a little mournful cadence.

“You are wrong to say I hate you. I hope I do not hate any one,” said Escott.

“I don’t ask you to do me the favour to like me,” said George, with a return of that little air of haughtiness Escott had remarked before; “but I do demand justice; that you should not accuse me of doing wrong, without being sure of the fact.”

“True; but you may deceive yourself as to your wrong-doing, we are all apt to deceive ourselves as to the amount of evil in our own actions, there is always a mistiness in our judgment of ourselves. We make exceptions for our own special case. I speak this as a generality. I judge of you by report, and I tell you frankly, I disapprove of you. Your evident want of belief shocks me; you have in you no foundation for goodness. You may not feel the want of true faith now, but as you grow older you will find yourself constantly fighting with the air, for want of it. God help you in the hour of temptation.”

“I am what I have been made, as you are what you have been made, I suppose; but pray, Mr. Escott, let me ask you one question. If a king or emperor were always to strike down the good, kill the innocent, and let the bad be prosperous, should you believe in the goodness of that sovereign? Why should Henry Hutton prosper and Charity Wood die?”

Escott looked towards the questioner, but George’s head was turned away. “You are a sharper chap than I took you for,” said the curate. “I understand the drift of your question. To the unbeliever, of course, every kind of evil must appear absolute, and therefore a *moral* evil in God’s dealing with man.

No doubt mystery does hang over many of God's ways. But even then, Faith can look confidently for some final winding up, some explanation or beneficial result here or hereafter. To talk, however, of Revelation, or of the law of Sacrifice to blind Unbelief is nonsense," said Escott, interrupting himself: "only remember, Unbelief involves us in deeper mystery than Faith. Faith cannot account indeed for the existence of so much apparent evil. Faith waits; and have we not often to suspend our judgment and wait with faith even for our fellow-creatures to explain *their* ways and words?"

It was George's turn to examine Escott's countenance. After a little silence the boy said with something of petulant interrogation in his tone, "The Transteverini are the strictest observers of church-going in the world, yet the knife is ever ready to their hand."

"Superstition is not religion," was the short answer.

They had now reached the same place at which they had met in the forenoon.

"Here our roads part," said Escott; the words had some discourtesy in them; truth to say, the curate was desirous of closing what seemed to him a profitless conversation. George lifted his cap with much of his usual careless air, and walked away a few steps; then he suddenly turned and hastened after Escott.

"I hope you are not angry with me," he said. His cheeks were deeply flushed, or perhaps it was only the reflection of the setting sun which had dyed woods and hills of a deep purple.

“Angry? no! I wish that you and all mankind might be partakers of the same blessings I myself enjoy.”

“My life is a nonsense,” burst out George, impetuously. “I don’t wish to live; no, I do not.”

“Wrong again,” and this time Escott spoke more gently, for he distinguished signs in the lad’s face which told of deep emotion checked. Escott, who was himself for ever struggling to master all his corporeal faculties, had an immediate sympathy with this effort at restraint. “We will have a talk some other day, George. Come, let us shake hands, as friends to be.”

In the evening after the newspaper had been perused, and Escott was meditating if any duty of the day yet remained to be done, his thoughts returned to the morning’s scene at Bowick, and then gradually veered round to George Brown. We often receive impressions of which we take no notice at the time of their reception. Escott now remembered how clammy cold the boy’s hand had been when he had shaken hands with him, and from that point he re-ascended, as it were, the whole course of their previous conversation, nor did he fail to recollect the strange overpowering expression with which George had looked at him on the hill.

“What he said to-day,” went on Escott, communing with himself, “shows him to be far from deficient in reflection; indeed, few boys of his age would have made the observation he did; his Latin has been neglected, but he has been taught to think. I wonder who and what these people are, what their

history, for a history they must have, and a strange one," and then again that intense look of feeling rose before the curate puzzling and perplexing him. Where had he ever met such a glance before, it was unfamiliar; yet surely he had seen such a one, or—was it only such as he had pictured to himself on reading some thrilling history of a man's life?

Escott was unhinged for his study of Hebrew, he could not fix his attention so as to discriminate between dots and no dots.

Have we not all experienced that state of mind which makes us go for sympathy to a book? When, for instance, we are labouring under the too great fulness of our hearts, we could not unveil those quick beats to any human eye, we could not ask from human lips to clear up for us the meaning of some vague awakening feeling—half joy, half alarm. And then do we not go to the well-known book-shelf, and give up the key of the inner sanctuary to some loved author? The gifted one puts order into the chaos of our thoughts, throws light on our emotions, his words like sweet music make us weep for gladness. Soul communicates free and unshackled with soul, we confess all that is palpitating within us, and need not afterwards blush that we have let any mortal see into the secret place of our hearts. Books are dear and safe confidants.

Some such want made Escott push aside grammar and dictionaries, and draw out of the book-slide on one side of his writing-table a volume that had been oftentimes consulted, to judge from the irregular

wavy line of the leaves; and then the curate opening it, read a page here and there, until like the bee finding at last the sought-for honeysuckle, he settled down firmly to gather the aliment he required.

No use to name the book; different diet suits different spirits. Suffice it to say that it was one of those works which paint, in vivid colours, the startling combination of good and evil in our natures; the work of a healthy writer, who dwelt still more on the good that is in all men, weak or wicked though they may be, than on the evil which lurks even in the best and strongest among us. Yet, while Escott's attention was chained to the pages he was reading, the *dramatis personæ* of the day's drama were passing to and fro in his mind.

Charity Wood—her coarse yet not hardened mother—George Brown, so strangely excited by the visit to the fading girl. Yes, there was good in them all, to be cherished and brought to maturity. Escott, in his dreams, carried on his last train of thought; he dreamed that he saw George falling over the rough bank which overhangs the sunk road to Bowick, and woke in his effort to save him.



CHAPTER XIII.

WHY?

WE no sooner have the conviction that we are appreciated or admired by any one, than we suddenly begin to judge the discriminating individual by a

different code from that we had been hitherto using. The man who can resist the effect produced by the knowledge of having inspired a disinterested affection must be below the rest of his species. There is something within us which, from the moment we are born, seeks for love; and that something increases its desires and demands with almost every year of our existence. It is when this craving is unsatisfied that some are driven into isolation, others into becoming bitter-tongued against mankind, haters of the sight of happiness, holding all the love and friendship they see displayed, as hypocrisies. The deepest grief that can befall us is, to be without confidence in the love of any other fellow-creature; to feel one's own heart full to overflowing with deep love, and to keep it pent up, in doubt of its being anywhere acceptable.

Escott recalling the expression of George Brown's eyes, as they had dwelt on himself after the visit to Charity Wood, remembering also the boy's anxiety lest he had incurred his anger, and the ensuing burst of despair, felt a new-born inclination, not to check or warn, but to be kind to the wilful lad. Instead of avoiding the Hatch as he had done chiefly from a distaste to George, he now frequently called on Mrs. Brown, and principally with a view to meeting her son. The curate was further propitiated by George's fulfilment of his promise not to seek the society of the girls on the common. It became almost a daily habit for George to accompany Escott either in his parochial visiting, or in his longer botanizing walks; and either George improved, or Escott grew accus-

tomed to his ways, for he no longer felt the boy's companionship irksome. Escott said at the rectory that he had great hopes of making a convert of George, of overcoming the bad influences of his childhood; he protested, that, though there still was more eccentricity of manner and speech than could be excused, George was now invariably respectful towards him, nay, rather over-doing his respect. But if the curate and George were progressing towards intimacy, it was not certainly through any favouring assistance from Mrs. Brown. Escott was never invited to the Hatch, never had been asked to stay dinner, even though he might have been there on the stroke of five. He could not understand or account for this increase of Mrs. Brown's reserve, except that she disapproved of the religious training he was giving George.

One day, it so happened that George was out of the way when Escott called; and in the course of conversation he spoke candidly to Mrs. Brown of his growing interest in George and of his wish to be of some use to him.

"The more I see of him," said Escott, "the more I wonder at my not having sooner done him justice; there is a curious mixture in him of impetuosity and gentleness, and a flow of generous delicate naïve sentiments not common in a boy, and very attaching. Probably this is owing to his having been always with you, and thus not having had the first bloom of his heart rubbed off by contact with other lads. It is pleasing, yet after all," he wound up, "it would not answer in the long run, for sons to be

brought up by their mothers, even if all mothers could produce the same result as you have done."

Neither the praise of her son nor herself seemed at all palatable to Mrs. Brown. "You are very kind," she said, "in making excuses for poor George's deficiencies; he is, however, very unfortunate in a way not necessary to explain. Believe me, I am not ungrateful for your kind intentions, but you are too young—I mean, I am sure you will allow that, as a mother, I must be best able to decide what is good for my child." Mrs. Brown had grown very pale while she said this. "Indeed, Mr. Escott," she went on, "I should be obliged to you if you would not send him any more books—if you would not have him so much with you." These words were pronounced with that accent of will, which marks a resolution long time fought against, but decisive when once it has been taken. Mrs. Brown's complexion was raised, her breathing short, and all her body agitated by a nervous contraction. The light was full on her face, and Escott, in his surprise at this unexpected speech, suddenly looked at her, and for the first time perceived small lines round her eyes, and at the corners of her mouth, undeniable witnesses of long wearying care. Mrs. Brown was old enough to be George's mother, without cause for astonishment: she was less an object for admiration, but much more touching to a man of feeling. Hitherto, he had thought her too cold—too passive, too indifferent to George, too careless as to his conduct. He guessed now that what he had taken for coldness was more probably the lassitude and

hopelessness of a long conflict with some trial; and if so, what strength of mind must she not have, to bear up as she did, without, as far as he knew, friendly support, or sympathy from any mortal, unless it were from her old German servant; he had a mental consciousness that George was no resource to her. That delicate woman had surely the soul of a stoic; never a complaint, or murmur, or sarcasm against the world, nor self-pity, as is too often the wont of persons arrived at maturity. He forgave whatever of offence might be conveyed in her words to himself, in admiration of this power of endurance.

All these arguments dashed through his mind in the two minutes of pause before he replied to her plainly expressed desire, that he should leave George alone.

"I shall of course comply with your wishes so far as not to seek George; only I could not throw back my little friend, nor would you exact it from me, if he applies to me for explanation or information on a subject he begins to feel one of vital importance."

"You may give him a great deal, but you have robbed him of the peace of childhood." Mrs. Brown drew a deep sigh; there was a vibration of anger in her voice. Escott was about to speak: she stopped him, saying hastily, "we will drop the subject if you please."

George came into the room at the moment. His eyes brightened as they always did at the sight of Escott. He went up to the curate and shook hands with him, saying, "Look out of the window and you'll see Eben White riding by with Jemima on a pillion behind him."

“What is that for?” asked Mrs. Brown.

“Oh! he’s determined to parade that way all through the parish to let every one know that they are really going to be married.”

“What folly,” exclaimed Escott, as the betrothed pair passed, seated on a tall chestnut horse, which had white bows on each side of its headstall. The bridegroom elect wore a bunch of white ribbons in his button hole; Jemima with her arm round his waist, scarlet from fear and excitement, looked like a full-blown peony. “After all the gossip there has been about them,” observed Escott, “if they had had a grain of sense between them, they would have managed their marriage as quietly as possible.”

“You don’t understand, Mr. Escott,” said George. “Eben says he wants to show everybody that he is proud of Jemima; it’s noble of him I think; old Miss Earl told me of what he was going to do, for I assure you,”—looking at Escott while the colour mounted to his very hair, “I have not spoken to Jemima for weeks.”

“I should not have blamed you, if you had,” replied Escott, smiling at George’s earnestness. “You took me too literally.”

“Yes, I am always either too much one way or the other,” sighed George.

As Escott did not answer as he usually did by some advice or argument, George looked at him, and at once discovered that something was wrong through that unknown power which makes us instantly aware, without any process of reasoning, of the state of mind of those we know well. George’s eyes left Escott’s

face and sought that of Mrs. Brown,—she had turned away.

Escott availed himself of the pause and made use of that awkward formula of leave-taking, “Well, I must be going.”

George went with him to the door. “I have finished the little book you lent me, Mr. Escott. I like it very much; will you lend me another?”

“You go too fast,” said Escott; “suppose you take a little time to think over what you have read, before you begin anything new.”

“If you advise me to do so. Are you going to take another long walk soon?”

“Not immediately.”

“I wish you could have stayed now. I wanted to play you Chopin’s ‘*Marche Funèbre*’; there is a page, that is wonderful—it seems as if the notes actually said, ‘Oh! how I regret that we shall never meet again;’ it is not fancy—couldn’t you come some evening when all the *Greatorex*s are gone out to dinner.”

“Shouldn’t you like Miss *Greatorex* to hear it also; she is such an admirer of your playing.”

“I can’t play when people come to admire me; never mind, it’s of no consequence, good-day;” and George returned to the drawing-room.

Escott walked away from the Hatch with mixed feelings, the predominant one, dissatisfaction, alike with himself as with the Browns. Once again the old suspicion of something wrong rose in his mind and would not be banished. He concluded his reflections thus: “I have no right to interfere between

mother and son, unless the son applies to me in my character of minister of the gospel. I am sorry for him, he will miss me I know. I see I have been very imprudent, and I have just got what I deserved."

Escott was a little grieved, and very much provoked and mortified; he was vexed with that vexation we all have, when we suspect we have made a fool of ourselves, that is, thrown away our kindness. As if any good act was ever entirely thrown away. "Do good, without thinking of to whom—whoever in the darkness lighteth another with a lamp, lighteth himself also; and the light is not part of ourselves, it is put into our hands by Him who hath appointed h e suns their courses."

George did not trouble Mr. Escott further in any way except one, and that was by entirely giving up his lately regular attendance at church.

"The seed has fallen on stony ground," said the curate to Maud. "I had hoped otherwise, poor boy."

"Yes, I am sure he is more to be pitied than blamed," replied Maud.

"I believe," continued Escott, "that it is the sense of his unfitness by nature to guide himself aright, which interests me; the same sort of interest with which one might watch a bad swimmer on a rough sea striving to reach the shore."

"Yes, certainly, one can't help being sorry for him," said Maud, but she did not speak as one who cared to pursue the subject.

Gradually, something like a damp sheet was spread over the intercourse between the rectory and the Hatch. Whether owing to an increase of re-

serve on Mrs. Brown's side, or to a diminishing of good-will in the 'Greatorexes', the fact of the two families seldom meeting was patent—though for some remissness in visiting, Maud and her mother had the plausible excuse of the approaching school examination.

Mrs. Lescrimière was the only one belonging to the rectory who continued to call at the Hatch as frequently as before; perhaps indeed she even went there now oftener. From the first Mrs. Lescrimière had taken up the defence of Mrs. Brown, and being of a disposition which led her always to side with the weakest, the moment the old lady saw or fancied she saw any waning of attention from her daughter to Mrs. Brown, she got up a private opposition in her own person. She petted Mrs. Brown as an elder woman can pet a younger; went to sit with her on those dark November days when solitude is least desirable, knitted slippers for her, and muffetees for George, sent up a folding screen belonging to herself, which the badly fitting doors of the Hatch made a necessary article of furniture, gave motherly advice about Mrs. Brown's health, and George's cough.

Had Mrs. Lescrimière been another kind of woman than what she was, she would perhaps have been chilled by Mrs. Brown's perfectly polite reserve, never for one instant abandoned; no, notwithstanding the old lady's warm-hearted attentions and actual services, never did Mrs. Brown have one quarter of an hour of *laissez aller*. As for George, the first glimpse of Mrs. Lescrimière was the signal for his retreat.

“It is sorrow, not hardness of heart,” was Mrs. Lescrimière’s explanation for this conduct,—she was not at all given to perceive slights to herself. “That woman,” she said in her thoughts, “is the victim of some wretch of a man, I’ll swear ; better not say so, however, or I shall frighten all the proprieties of the neighbourhood into fits. I should be glad to know what has made my daughter so suddenly cool to the poor creature, and even little Maud looks ill-used if I so much as name Mrs. Brown.”

Matters were in this state when Miss Cox, the parish schoolmistress, went one morning to the Hatch.



CHAPTER XIV.

DANGER FLAG.

Miss Cox, the schoolmistress of Eden, had had a continual headache for the last three weeks, produced, partly by the stupidity of the children which increased, as the interval before the examination decreased, and, partly, by the anxiety whether Mr. Broadwood, the Government inspector, whom she had known when she was herself under training, would remember her, and stand her friend on this occasion. The stake to her was nine pounds a year additional salary, or nothing. Surely he might have learned by this time what country children were, how certain in the flurry of seeing a stranger to forget everything they knew best ; if they could not

recollect their own names in such circumstances, how was it possible to expect them to recollect the names of rivers and countries they had never beheld?

This argument was potent and conclusive with poor Miss Cox; but how would it fare with Mr. Government Inspector? Facts are stubborn witnesses against special pleading; she acknowledged this, and fretted night and day. When we are slipping down a precipice we catch at any twig; it must have been some sensation akin to falling or drowning that sent Miss Cox in her demi-distraction to the Hatch to ask Mrs. Brown to be present at the impending school-examination.

Mrs. Brown received her visitor, whom she could not recall ever having seen before, with her usual polite reserve. Miss Cox was of course perfectly acquainted with all that the village had conjectured about Mrs. Brown, and now brought face to face with that lady, she sat for a while absorbed in speculations as to her age and social position, much as Mrs. Greatorix had done some months ago. The schoolmistress was reminded of her own affairs by Mrs. Brown saying, "In what way can I be of use to you, Miss Cox?"

Miss Cox, who had, it must be owned, indulged a little in the idea that she and Mrs. Brown might not be considered as too widely sundered by rank and fortune to become associates, on being thus addressed, gentle and civil as was the tone in which the words were spoken, felt that there was a strongly traced line between her and the person speaking. Subsiding without effort into the rank of life in which

it had pleased God to place her, Miss Cox burst forth, "Thank you, Mrs. Brown; if you would be so good, you and Mr. George, as to come down to the school to-morrow, while Mr. Broadwood is there, you would greatly oblige me, indeed you would, Mrs. Brown." Miss Cox would have thought she demeaned herself by using the word, "ma'am."

"I should be glad to do anything to oblige you," said Mrs. Brown; "but I am at a loss to understand of what service we could be to you in this instance."

"Oh! you can't believe, Mrs. Brown, what the stupidity of those children is. There are those twins—the Dackses, I mean—no driving any one single thing into their heads, and I should like to have friends to stand by me in such a moment; it will be nine pounds or nothing, Mrs. Brown, and they don't care a bit for all the trouble and vexation and worry they give. I am not afraid of the writing or the boys' sums. I do hope you will come, Mrs. Brown; and if Mr. George ——" Miss Cox stopped for breath.

"As you wish it so much," began Mrs. Brown.

"Oh! dear, yes, it's a moral support I want, Mrs. Brown, and I am so shut up, and shut out from all companionship, it's so very lonely, and my window looking out on the churchyard, sometimes I fancy I shall forget how to talk except on school matters. It's a sad deprivation, I assure you, Mrs. Brown. I had hoped," she went on, "to hear Mr. George play, 'music is such a boon.'"

"George is not at home, I am sorry to say."

"Oh! Mrs. Brown, may I hope you will allow

me to call again some other day. We never see Mr. George now at Coldblows; he is such a loss."

"The weather is against long walks," said Mrs. Brown, and then at last Miss Cox took her leave, after again beseeching Mrs. Brown to give her the moral support of her presence the following forenoon.

As we constantly discover when we have put ourselves extremely out of our way in acceding to a request like that of Miss Cox, Mrs. Brown found out too late that she might very well have remained quietly at the Hatch, without Miss Cox being aware of her absence. When Mrs. Brown entered the schoolroom, that young woman with her cheeks a bright scarlet was insensible to any presence save that of Mr. Broadwood and the three rows of children before whom he was standing.

Mr. Broadwood was a tall man, of middle-aged English appearance; a little jerk upwards of the corners of his mouth, and a twinkle in the eye, betraying a love of humour. The children were in front of him, and great maps of England, France, and America behind him. Near the stove were grouped Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex, and Escott. Maud was at the end of the room opposite to the window, trying to control a set of little ones of ages varying from three to five. Nothing but a severe glance from Mrs. Greatorex could subdue one large-eyed obstreperous fellow in petticoats.

Mr. Greatorex found Mrs. Brown a chair next to his wife, and then she heard Mr. Broadwood saying, "Well! what is Lincoln famous for besides?" Dead silence. "Come, think; what is your favourite bird,

I mean for eating?" A subdued titter. "You," addressing himself pointedly to a bright-looking girl with black eyes. "What's her name?" in an aside to Miss Cox. "Maryanne Nunn, what's your favourite bird?"

"Poll parrot, if you please, sir."

"You don't eat poll parrots, do you? And you?" to her neighbour.

"Parrot, sir," very solemnly said.

"And you, and you?" went on Mr. Inspector. "What, always the same answer?"

A little urchin of seven here squeaked out, "Please, sir, a canary."

"A tomtit," whispered another.

"We have got all astray," sighed Mr. Broadwood. Miss Cox's colour deepened, brighten it could not.

"Why, what do some of you at least eat at Michaelmas?"

"A goose!" came in chorus from the ranks.

"Ah! at last we have it. Then remember Lincoln is famous for goose feathers. Very good."

Indeed Miss Cox's prophecy was fully verified in the crowning display when questions from the Bible were put. It was enough to provoke a saint, and it did provoke sweet Maud almost into a passion. Mr. Broadwood courteously invited Mr. Greatorex or Escott to take this part of the examination on themselves. "You are more conversant with the subject-matter than I am. I am afraid of making but a bad catechizer." The parson and the curate were so sure of their scholars, that they begged Mr. Broadwood to go on.

Not one child appeared ever to have heard of the good Samaritan. In vain the inspector prompted them. "You know, children, that travellers often meet with mishaps; now what chanced to a certain man who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho?"

After a long silence one of the twins so dreaded by Miss Cox, stirred by the associations of ideas connected with Jericho, declared that "the man blew a trumpet."

"No, not exactly," said Mr. Broadwood, "you are thinking of another event. This poor traveller fell in with thieves, and then he met, who?" A long unbroken pause—you might have heard a pin drop. Great beads of moisture stood on Miss Cox's aching brows. "A Levite," prompted Mr. Broadwood, "a sort of clergyman."

"A Pharisee," suggested a boy.

Mr. Broadwood was deaf. "And what did he meet next?" Then afraid of his own question, he added, "I mean what sort of good man?"

"His neighbour," said a voice, timidly.

"Very good, very good, a Samaritan who proved the neighbour to him who fell among thieves."

It was not only Miss Cox who had red cheeks by this time.

"Who could imagine that those good-for-nothing children know the parables by heart?" whispered Mrs. Greateorex to Mrs. Brown. Maud could have beaten them all round, her particular class to have so disgraced itself. We will not inquire into what Escott would willingly have awarded the delinquents.

The sums fortunately went off satisfactorily, and

the writing was deservedly praised. Mr. Broadwood understood the case; he complimented poor Miss Cox, (who now scarcely knew whether she had a head or not), and waggishly reproached the clergymen for having set him to do that which was to show the children how easily an inspector might be puzzled.

"I am sure you will have your certificate," said Maud soothingly to the schoolmistress; "as soon as it is all over, do go and lie down for an hour or two. Horrid little creatures! they have given me a headache also."

Mrs. Brown's appearance in the schoolroom had occasioned a shock of surprise to the rectory party. How extraordinary! and she, always so disinclined to meeting strangers! Miss Cox had never mentioned her visit to the Hatch; indeed, after she had begged Mrs. Brown to come, she began to be afraid that Mrs. Greatorex might be displeased with her for having made the request, and therefore not only did Miss Cox not mention the probability of Mrs. Brown's appearing, but by providing only five chairs, three for the rectory, one for the curate, and one for the inspector, threw off all suspicions from herself of expecting a sixth visitor.

Rectors' ladies have generally some fault to find with the schoolmistresses: "An excellent girl," they say, "but I do wish she managed the children better." The schoolmistress either overdrives, or does not drive enough; and she, in her turn, acknowledges the rector's lady or daughter, as it may be, to be very good and kind, but too interfering, and always patronizing the wrong pupils. The schoolmistress

knows by intuition who the rectory prefers, and those are the persons she least likes. Miss Cox was aware that Mrs. Greator and Miss Maud were not so "taken up" with Mrs. Brown as they had been, and she therefore was inclined "to take up" Mrs. Brown; but on second thoughts, self-interest conquered, and Miss Cox would rather not make visible her partisanship. So she left it to chance to reveal why Mrs. Brown came to the schoolhouse that particular day, when she had never done so before.

"That power which erring men call chance," had surely inspired Miss Cox to persuade Mrs. Brown to come to the examination. It was the last of that poor lady's quiet days at the Hatch.

Mr. Broadwood was to take an early dinner or lunch at the rectory; and the rector whispered to his wife to ask Mrs. Brown to stop and partake of the meal. The same unknown power worked on Mrs. Brown to believe that it would be churlish in her to refuse, though it really went sorely against her inclination to accept the invitation. There is truly a fate that overlays our purposes. An Alp does not arrest the conqueror's career, but a molehill does. So is it with our precautionary measures; it is the neglect of some trifle which baffles all our previous momentous successful efforts.

The ladies took off their bonnets before sitting down to table. Now, it is a remarkable fact that even wearied, spectacled, elderly inspectors of schools, like, as well as younger, idler men, to look at sweet faces;—and our present inspector, all unfit to be admired

himself, was the readier to admire. His eye travelled from the still charming-looking Mrs. Lescrimière to her handsome daughter, his hostess; lingered and softened as it dwelt on young, blooming, loveable Maud, and finally fixed itself with a sort of amazed delight on Mrs. Brown. Such a face as that is not met with every day.

The heat of the schoolroom and the contention of her mind had brought into Mrs. Brown's cheeks the most delicate rose-colour, making more striking the clear soft white of the rest of her face. Mr. Inspector had rarely, if ever, seen such a perfectly shaped head, such hair, such eyes, such a throat! Yet even while he was thinking thus, he recollected having beheld something like it all, and not long ago. Yes, this beauty resembled some one he had very lately seen. Who could it have been? Where could it have been? The more he gazed, the more certain he became that he had come across a similar countenance within the last month. And yet he could not recall having been so vividly struck as he was at the present moment.

Escott, who was on the other side of the table to Mrs. Brown, inquired after George. Mrs. Brown answered with a blush she could have spared, that George was well, but not inclined to accept of Miss Cox's invitation to attend the school-examination."

Mrs. Greatorax looked at Mr. Greatorax and Maud as much as to say, "Ah! now we know how it was!"

"I do not think your son looking well," observed Mrs. Lescrimière; "he is thin and pale."

"He is growing, I hope," said Mrs. Brown, again flushing like a girl.

Then some word led the conversation to Fechter and to his personation of Hamlet. "I went pre-determined to find fault with him," said the inspector; "the idea of a foreigner murdering our Shakspeare's English! it was abominable. In the first scenes I hated the fellow with all my heart; I resisted as long as I could, but before the end I had forgotten all about his country or his accent. I was engrossed by Hamlet, Prince of Denmark — such princely urbanity of manner, such discrimination and pathos, manly and gentlemanly. Have you been to see Fechter?" asked Mr. Broadwood, suddenly addressing Mrs. Brown; perhaps he had seen her at the theatre.

"No, indeed, and I am afraid I cannot go to London this season."

The inspector went on, without remembering that he was speaking to reverends who might disapprove of play-going. "It is worth while, I assure you, to go to town expressly to see him."

When the ladies had withdrawn, Mr. Broadwood asked,—"Who is your beautiful guest?"

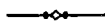
"I wish you could tell us," said Mr. Greatorex, smiling; "we have nearly died of curiosity. She came here now some six or seven months ago with her son, a lad of perhaps fifteen, a queer fish he is, with quite a genius for music. They have rented the old, half-dilapidated house at the other end of the village, which you must have passed as you drove here. We did not mean to have anything to say to them, as the lady did not at first attend church: but in a retired place like this, it is difficult to avoid making acquaintance with a neighbour, and Mrs.

Lescrimière and the children managed to bring about a sort of intimacy between us. A more inoffensive parishioner it would be difficult to find than Mrs. Brown ; she does good also, and the boy is improved, at least is more orderly, I think, Escott, since you took him in hand."

"She is one of the loveliest women I ever saw," said Mr. Broadwood. "I am sure," he continued, "that I have seen her somewhere before to-day ; but for the life of me can I tell where."

"She certainly has not left the parish," replied Mr. Greator, "I may say, since she came, unless for a few hours ; have you been much at Z——?"

"Never been in these parts before this month," said Mr. Inspector. "No, no, it was not anywhere near this."



CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW OF LOVE.

CAN people be in love, and have their hearts free of occasional distracting doubts ?

Many there are who assert that to suppose they have ever for one instant been a prey to jealousy of one they love, would be as false as to accuse them of envy, malice, or any uncharitableness. These three last temptations of the soul we pray against as being common to humanity, but against jealousy, the most maddening of all the passions, we certainly find no mention in our general supplication ; we may there-

fore conclude, if we choose, that it is not common to humanity. However that may be, little Maud had never had even a twinge of it, when this story began; did not know what the sensation was like. Books do not teach it, in spite of all their close descriptions. No, you must have had at least one jealous pang of your own, before you can sympathize with Othello. It is naughty, mean, unnatural, *tout ce qu'on voudra*; but it is naughtier, meaner, to excite it wilfully or carelessly: naughtiest, meanest, the tittle-tattling or innuendo, which sows the seed of distrust, whose fruit is jealousy. It is with this last species of naughtiness that we have at present to do.

Mrs. Lonsdale did not read much, but she talked much, of her husband, her nephews and nieces, her adventures by sea and land, her servants, her garden—proper feminine subjects all of them. They did not, however, complete the circle of Mrs. Lonsdale's interests. If she did not become absorbed in a new novel, she did in the romance of real life as related to her by Porteous her lady's maid. From Porteous (recommended by her last mistress as a perfect treasure) she heard that Mr. Escott had taken lately to going very often to the Hatch; it was said he was teaching Mr. George something or other, and Mrs. Lonsdale innocently enough, it must be owned, replied, by asking if Porteous had ever seen Mrs. Brown.

Yes. Porteous had seen the lady when she called at Belmont.

"A regular beauty, isn't she?" said the mistress.

"Well'm, to my ideer, she does this," and Porteous made believe to rouge her own cheeks.

"Nonsense! why should she? living in that frightful old house and not a decent soul ever entering it."

"H'm." Porteous cleared her throat.

"What is it? Porteous, have you heard anything? Come, I know you are dying to tell. What can it be?"

Porteous was coy, very coy, and it was only by very safe hints that Mrs. Lonsdale made out that Porteous considered the Hatch not a safe place for a gentleman like Mr. Escott, in the church, and in his situation too with Miss Greatorrex, to be going to, day after day, that was all. Porteous had a high opinion of Mr. Escott, men *never* was to blame in such cases, and she hoped Mrs. Lonsdale wouldn't use her name for she wasn't one as made mischief. Porteous was so hoity-toity in her virtuous indignation that Mrs. Lonsdale was cowed and convinced.

Mrs. Lonsdale was not long in calling at the rectory, and there, amid many lamentations as to the requirements now-a-days of servants, their ingratitude, their never knowing when they were well off, she managed to bring in what Porteous considered bad for Mr. Escott, making sure first that Mrs. Lescrimière was not in the room.

"Do you still like Mrs. Brown as well as ever?" she began.

"Yes, I think so; we don't see much of her, for she remains constant to her hermit's life," said Mrs. Greatorrex.

"Ah! but I hear she has a father confessor to lighten her solitude. How do you approve of that?" and Mrs. Lonsdale turned to Maud.

"I don't understand," said Maud.

“Doesn’t Mr. Escott tell you, then, of his visits to the Hatch?”

“He goes there very seldom, I believe,” said Maud.

“It’s all right I suppose. Don’t tell that I have been letting the cat out of the bag.”

“I don’t see any cat,” said Mrs. Greatorex, laughing.

“Well, everybody knows their own business best,” said Mrs. Lonsdale, “and I never meddle with my neighbour, indeed, it is quite a point with Mr. Lonsdale; his motto is, ‘Live and let live,’ a very good one I am sure. Next time, Miss Maud, you come to Belmont I’ll show you a new stitch; Mrs. Sullivan taught it me the other day; poor woman, I wonder she has time to learn anything, with all that pack of children to look after; they had the pap warming on the hob the last time I called; neither she nor the captain seemed in the least put out when I went in: officers’ wives you know have a deal to go through, and so have colonists’ ladies, I can tell you. I was maid-of-all-work for months. It’s a good thing Miss Maud here has chosen a man who will be stationary and live at ease,” and after rattling thus for another quarter of an hour, Mrs. Lonsdale drove away with the most heavenly feelings of contentment with herself and all the world.

“What a chatterbox!” exclaimed Mrs. Greatorex, as Mrs. Lonsdale kissed her hand, as the carriage whirled past the drawing-room window. “What was that she was saying about Walter and the Browns?”

Maud replied,—“Some of her usual gossiping

nonsense ; but, mamma, it is getting late, and you must go and see Willy Jones to-day."

"I had nearly forgotten all about him," said the rector's lady, and went upstairs to put on her bonnet and fill a basket with medicines and wine for a sick child at the other end of the parish.

Maud, with the extreme modesty of a young girl's love, could not have endured any discussion as to Escott's visits to Mrs. Brown ; but unfortunately Mrs. Lonsdale's silly hints gave substance to a shadowy grievance she had had against Escott, and exactly on account of his being so often at the Hatch.

It had been no fancy of Mrs. Lescrimière's that her daughter and granddaughter had grown cool to the Browns. Mrs. Greatorex *had* relaxed in her attentions to them, because she had imbibed suspicions that they were distasteful to Maud, though she had never succeeded in bringing the young lady to say an unfavourable word of mother or son.

Nor had Maud been more candid with Escott. He always seemed so sure that what he thought right to do, she must think right should be done, that she had no courage to speak her mind. Jean Paul says the more weakness, the more lying ; force goes straight ; any cannon-ball with holes or cavities in it goes crooked. If husbands and lovers wouldn't frighten brides and wives into cowardly assentors there wouldn't be sometimes such a confusion in a woman's mind as to right and wrong. How often rather than rouse anger or be left in a huff, a woman pretends to approve where she does not ; turns flatterer, instead of the friend who gives an honest opinion. Escott went on

his course with an undoubting confidence in Maud's approbation, that would have been either almost touching or almost ludicrous, according to what might be the character of the looker-on who was also aware of Maud's real feelings. And this was what came of his blindness.

Within a week or two after the school examination, Escott received, from the college of which he was a Fellow, the offer of a living in an adjoining county. The parish was within an easy distance of Eden, half a day's journey by rail, a pretty parsonage, situated pleasantly as to neighbourhood, and with a scanty population of tolerably well-to-do parishioners : the stipend a little above two hundred.

Though young ladies may find it hard of belief, a man gifted with common sense may be very sincerely in love, and yet not utterly disregard all prudential considerations. Escott must not, therefore, be condemned as cold-blooded and unworthy of Maud's love because he determined to take a few days for reflection. No, not even when having been spoiled by Maud's always being of his opinion, he decided that it was a case of which he would himself be the best judge.

He had a small fortune of his own, but he looked for nothing with Maud ; a rector with six children, four of whom were boys to be educated for liberal professions, could not be expected to give more to his daughters during his lifetime than their trousseaux. Escott had chosen Maud for herself alone, and having done so, it behoved him, for both their sakes, to be more than ever careful as to other arrangements for their future comfort. He was liberal-handed by nature,

and, he, moreover, considered it one of the primary duties of a clergyman to keep open house for the poor. That large charity dispensed by monasteries was one of the customs of olden days, which he was never tired of quoting, admiring, recommending, and, in as far as his means allowed, imitating.

The first day was one of hesitation. Did he accept this living, he must either oblige Maud to live in a manner to which she had never been accustomed, or condemn himself to exercise a scrimp benevolence. Besides, he recollected, with much vividness, some powerful descriptions of clergymen with large families and small incomes—he closed his eyes with a shudder. The second day he said to himself that Maud was only nineteen, and he not thirty; they could afford to wait a year or two, the better that they could see each other every day. The third morning he awoke, thinking that it might, after all, be a foolish thing to refuse a bird in the hand, &c., and then suppose, instead of a year or two, he had to wait ten years for the two birds in the bush. Maud would be thirty, nearly middle-aged—and he forty! That would never do. While dressing he hummed to himself one of Maud's favourite songs—an old-fashioned ballad indeed.

Dear Cloe, while the busy crowd,
The vain, the wealthy, and the proud,
In folly's maze advance;
Though singularity and pride
Be call'd our choice, we'll step aside,
Nor join the giddy dance.

From the gay world we'll oft retire
To our own family and fire;
Where love our hours employs;

No noisy neighbour enters here,
No intermeddling stranger near,
To spoil our heartfelt joys.

Very pretty visions did these words evoke as he strapped his razor, and laid on a white fringe to his dark chin. Home—sweet home, a garden with flourishing Americans, superior to those of all his neighbours, young and *growing* plantations, with a peep of his church between them, Maud in kilted gown showing her scarlet petticoat and neat boots tripping over an emerald lawn to the school-house. The grave curate actually whistled—it is to be hoped not a polka—and ran downstairs to his breakfast, determined to accept the good provided for him.

On the breakfast-cloth, close to his solitary teacup, lay a letter. Escott knew the hand—he first made his tea, and then broke the seal. His correspondent was also a clergyman: Escott had been at the same college with him; it was a sad letter, a chronicle of misfortunes, a book of lamentations. The reverend writer, rich in nothing else, was rich in sons and daughters. Everything besides had been and was a failure—even to this autumn's apple harvest. The conclusion was, "Could Escott lend so much money?"

Escott's eyes lost their brightness. "Everything that happens to us, is over-ruled," thought he. "I must not defy the warning."

The postman carried away two letters from him. One containing a cheque to his heavily-burdened friend—the other a polite and grateful refusal to the college of the offered benefice. Escott was satisfied that he had come to a right decision, yet rather in

low spirits, he walked to the rectory to make known what he had done with regard to the living; as for the other matter, be sure no one but his banker and the poor reverend would ever hear of that.



CHAPTER XVI.

A WORD BEFORE, IS WORTH TWO AFTER.

ESCOTT for a wonder found only Mrs. Lescrimière and Maud in the rectory drawing-room. Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex were gone to pay distant visits; the children happily out walking. Grandmamma made no excuse for leaving the *promessi sposi* alone.

Escott gave Maud the letter to read containing the offer of the living. His eyes dwelt on her, not with any intention of reading her thoughts, but because she was looking prettier than usual. Her dress became her, and besides she was thoroughly tranquil, knowing that there would be no noise or interruption to vex Escott. As she read her colour came and went most becomingly—she breathed fast—and the dark thick eyelashes lay lower and lower on her cheek, as she returned the letter.

“Well, Maud,” he began, and suddenly stopped—she had looked up at him with bashful happy eyes. Escott guessed immediately, that she had jumped to a very rash conclusion; and from awkwardness not unkindness, said, brusquely, “Well, dear, I have refused.” A scarlet flush—so unlike the soft blush of a moment ago—covered the whole of the girl’s face

—she felt quickly and confusedly as if Escott had offended her.

“I declined,” went on Escott, with increasing discomfort, without first telling you, because I knew that it was just a case in which you would not wish to interfere—or bias me. In short, dear Maud, I viewed the matter in all lights, and decided that I could not, in justice to either of us, accept such an offer.”

Maud had nothing to say. Escott added, hurriedly, “And so happily situated as we are, seeing one another daily, I thought we could wait with patience a little longer, for the chance of something better.”

“Wait with patience!” Why would he not hold his tongue—why think it incumbent on him to give her reasons and explanations; as if the most reasonable woman in the world could bear to have her lover preaching “patience and waiting” to her.

Maud knew she ought to speak, and instinct taught her to say with spirit, “Indeed I think it would have been very wrong to take it. Papa and mamma will be very glad you did not.” Poor little soul, she did not hide her wound from Escott.

“You must not misunderstand me, Maud,” he said, more and more disturbed. “I took time to reflect—— I do wish——” he wished to say to her, that he should be extremely happy to be married—to have her as his dear little wife in a snug home of their own; he wished to tell her of the strange coincidence of his friend’s letter arriving like a providential warning just as he had resolved on writing an acceptance to the college—but Escott was a sensitive man, and Maud’s manner repelled the confidence on his lips.

“How was it she misunderstood his motives?” he asked himself impatiently. Was Maud then like the common run of women, who never believe in a man’s love, unless he commits some folly which compromises their happiness?

Escott had rightly divined Maud’s feelings; she argued, felt, and resented just as any other inexperienced girl might do. “Romeo when he loved Juliet never thought of consequences, did he?”

Being uncomfortable where he was, Escott got up to go away. It was sung long, long ago, before we had any Anno Domini to count by, “If the man finds aught displeasing in his house, abroad he seeks relief,” and men’s feelings have not altered since then, any more than their habits: so up rose Escott to take his leave. He retained Maud’s hand in his, seeking her eyes; he longed to make friends; he was sorry to have hurt her, vexed that she was hurt. He sought in vain for any kind answering glance, and was too proud to make further advances.

“I may tell papa and mamma?” she asked as he turned away disappointed.

“Of course. I will explain to Mr. Greatorex all my reasons for acting as I have done. God bless you,” he added in a low voice, a most unusual leave-taking for him.

Maud held out even against the tenderly spoken blessing. But no sooner did she hear the front door close than she would have given worlds to have him back. She was discontented with him, piqued, jealous, still she could not bear his absence. It was one thing to fret him, and he present; for there is

indeed a sort of pungent pleasure in a lover's quarrel, akin to that given by highly spiced and peppered dishes, which nevertheless make your tongue smart and your eyes water ; but it was quite another affair to be left to shed tears alone, or rather to feel your heart bursting and not be able to weep ; one seldom does that in solitude. Maud's womanly pride had had the upper hand for a moment—doubts and fears quickly brought it low. But for that last whispered, God bless you—she would have been in despair. Suddenly she forgot her own distresses, to think of what mamma would say. Maud had very often had to blind her mother to Escott's oversights or inadvertencies. If Mrs. Greatorax had been so often astonished by what had not astonished Maud, what would be the case now, when even Maud was surprised and hurt. Surely something dreadful would happen, something that could not be undone.

In a panic, Maud rushed upstairs to dress for dinner, every cause of complaint against Escott forgotten in the dread of some insurmountable barrier being raised between them. She chose gay attire, the better to mislead her mother as to her feelings, then down again to the drawing-room, where seating herself at the piano she began to practise assiduously. Papa and mamma would never suspect anything was wrong with her, if they found her playing.

It all occurred as Maud had hoped—the first sounds the rector and his wife heard on entering the house were the cheerful notes of their eldest daughter's music ; the impression was very agreeable. Before taking off her bonnet the mother put

her head into the schoolroom, and there were the younger ones all well and merry at their tea. She laid down a bag of buns, and ran away from any questionings to prepare for dinner.

While the faithful Anne, half nurse, half lady's-maid, was fastening some matronly lappets into Mrs. Greatorex's hair, that lady thought, "Well! people sentimentalize over the unhappiness of this world, I don't know why, I can't say I find it so miserable a place—but I do believe it depends principally on oneself. Conduct is fate"—and without a suspicion that she had committed the error of the Pharisee, Mrs. Greatorex smiled at the image of the prosperous woman she saw in her mirror. Yes, success in anything or any way is a great puff adder—it poisons our charity, our kindliness, paralyzes our judgment.

When Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex came into the drawing-room, just before dinner, Maud took advantage of there being no light but that from the fire to say,—

"Oh! papa, Walter came here this afternoon to tell us that he had had an offer of a living."

Mr. Greatorex said, sharply for him, "What?"

"You needn't be afraid, dear papa," and Maud put her arm within his, "there's no chance of your getting rid of me yet." She spoke cheerfully; the little candid daughter was trying to deceive her parents, and thinking it quite right to do so.

"He has refused it then; is that what you mean, Maud?" asked Mrs. Greatorex.

"Oh! mamma, mamma, your voice is full of

disappointment, isn't it, papa? I am not at all flattered."

"Positively declined it, Maud?" reiterated Mrs. Greatorex.

"Yes—he said it wouldn't have suited *me*;" said Maud firmly—"he is coming to tell you all about it himself."

"What's the use if he has refused it, as you say he has—he might have waited for our opinion—for your father's at least."

"I can better trust Escott's judgment than my own"—said the rector; he had felt his daughter's arm tremble—she pressed her head against his shoulder and said so low that he could scarcely be sure of the words, "Good papa."

The two pair of very wide open ears belonging to the footman and smart parlour-maid, did not allow of the subject being continued during dinner. At dessert the tongues of the family were loosened. Master Charlie with his hair freshly brushed and a smart little neck-tie, Carry without her pinafore and with a long sash, then made their appearance to be sure; but no one thought of being on their guard before the children, and yet is it not a proverb, that "Bairns speak in the field what they hear in the hall?"

"Have you heard, grandmamma," began Mrs. Greatorex, as soon as she had made sure that papa had not given more than a justifiable quantity of fruit to the two young ones, "have you heard that Walter has had the offer of a living, and refused it point blank?" Charlie laid down his bit of pear, and opened his eyes very wide. The little tone of com-

plaint in Mrs. Greatorex's voice did not pass unnoticed by Mrs. Lescrimière, who replied in her usual off-hand way, "Well, my dear, I suppose he had some good reasons for refusing."

"Indeed he had, grandmamma," said Maud, with rapid alternations of colour.

"I dare say it was one of those bad practical jokes, where a living means a starving," continued Mrs. Lescrimière. "I am glad Escott has shown himself a man of sense in a case where so many men would have acted on the principle of taking no care for the morrow."

Mrs. Lescrimière's well-meant speech went, as well-meant speeches often do, the wrong way; it touched the aching place in Maud's heart. The young lady had always heard, that where there was much feeling there was little reason; and here was grandmamma praising Escott for showing sense where other men circumstanced like himself usually lose their heads. Grandmamma's speech did double duty; it made even kind Mr. Greatorex look grave—why would his mother-in-law quote scripture so perversely before a clergyman and a clergyman's children—it was like abusing the sovereign in the presence of those who wear that sovereign's uniform.

"Mother," said Charlie, breaking the silence, and imperiously claiming Mrs. Greatorex's attention, "when will Walter get another living?"

"I can't tell, my dear."

"Then Maud won't be married before I go to school, perhaps not for ever so long, eh, mother?"

"It all depends on circumstances, Charlie," said Mrs. Greatorex pettishly.

Maud heard this dialogue, though Carry was whispering to her: "We met Walter on the Lea and 'poor Dodge.'" Carry had learned to call George "poor Dodge" from her mother. "Walter said he wasn't coming here this evening—for I asked him—perhaps he is going to take tea with Mrs. Brown."

Mr. Greatorrex recovering from his gravity, now replied to Mrs. Lescrimière. "I am glad," he said, "that Escott and Maud settled the matter without applying to me. Every man must be the best judge of what he requires to live upon."

Charlie here put in his voice again, diverting attention from Escott's affairs. Maud was by this time all over pin-point wounds. "Motherkin," stroking her hand—"Charlton is let—yes, indeed it is—I met Mrs. Lonsdale out driving, and she stopped and told me to tell you—it's to somebody very rich, and he has a governess and lots of children—but she didn't say he had a wife, and he's not old—not so old as papa, for I asked."

Mr. Greatorrex laughed, saying as most papas do on such occasions, "You jackanapes, what do you mean by calling me old?"

"Charlton is beyond our drives," said Mrs. Greatorrex, "and I shall not call on any more strangers unless they have introductions to the neighbourhood—besides, what's the use?" she added in a lower voice: Mrs. Greatorrex was out of sorts with Escott—a faint regret rising in her mind. Maud might have done better. Mothers are often very inconstant to their intended sons-in-law.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE'S CURSE.

THIS evening was as like other evenings Maud had remembered for years, as are two leaves of the same tree. Mrs. Lescrimière sat on one side of the fire in her own chair with her moderator lamp on a stand to her right, reading the newspaper, with (as usual) bursts of indignation such as, "*I cannot* understand how the English can be so blind to their own shortcomings—constantly burning incense to themselves—they are the greatest people, the most civilized, enterprising, far-sighted, inventive, clever nation under the sun—they never seem to recollect the existence of France, and yet I think France has some little influence on the world."

And Mr. Greatorex looking across from his side of the fire to the speaker answered (as usual) placidly, "It's our good opinion of ourselves makes our force—once rob a man of his self-esteem, and he goes to the wall in no time. We claim a high character for ourselves, and we feel bound to act up to it—the proof that we do so, is the universal respect felt for England, even by those who criticize and rail at the English."

"Universal respect, my son, for English gold——"

"Hush!" says Mr. Greatorex, "you are pleading against your own clients."

In the meantime Mrs. Greatorex, busy about some work, was interrupted every half-dozen stitches by a

question from Charlie, who with his hands buried in his curly locks was reading a volume of Walter Scott, and was horribly perplexed by the Scotch dialogues.

Maud had seen and heard the same sayings and doings over and over again, for years. Everything seemed to have stood still but herself; she had suddenly burst into some new world. After tea, she would have to play Mozart's Twelfth Mass to her father, and he would go to sleep and wake up with the last chord, and thank her with the same politeness as though she had been some guest. Mr. Greatorrex's politeness to the members of his own family was perfect; and it had the happy effect of keeping under all violent demonstrations of temper. Prayers at ten, and a courteous good-night to the assembled servants—and then Maud was in her own room.

Mrs. Greatorrex always accompanied grandmamma to her bed-chamber to have a few words of confidential chat; in all the twenty years of Mrs. Greatorrex's marriage, she had never broken through that habit.

"I am not satisfied with this business of Walter's," began the rector's wife. "I am out of all patience with him, mother; he is a man of wood—not a drop of warm blood in his veins."

"Hey-day, Louisa—that's a new view of yours—whatever he is, Maud loves him, my dear."

Mrs. Greatorrex went on angrily, "I'll tell you what it is, mother, she doesn't know him a bit better now than she did the day he proposed to her—I am certain he never talks to her of the future. It is a puzzle to me why they marry."

“As for that, my good daughter, every one is puzzled by their neighbour’s choice; attraction and repulsion are mysteries—the effect exists, we see and feel that—the why and wherefore are hidden.”

“I don’t believe he has ever even kissed her,” exclaimed Mrs. Greatorax. The tone of this exclamation was too much for Mrs. Lescrimière; she burst into one of her loudest and merriest laughs—Mrs. Greatorax half ashamed of her own speech retreated for the night.

A light tap at Maud’s door, and in came grand-mamma. “My dear child, I want to ask you, if what I said at dessert pained you. I really should have thought Escott a selfish goose if, for the sake of a few months’ delay, he had hurried you into life-long difficulties—besides, with his large ideas of benevolence, he would have pinched himself in every way, denied himself every little pleasure to give away with both hands—and, my dear girl, the best of men, acting upon principle, bear great sacrifices well, but small ones sting them into crossness, a very common-place word—the one though which best expresses my meaning—do you understand, Maud?”

“Yes, indeed, grandmamma—and indeed I am not pained or hurt—neither by you nor anybody else.”

“Then good-night, my child—I just wished to be sure I had not vexed you—good-night.”

As soon as Mrs. Lescrimière had closed the door, Maud placed the light on the mantelpiece and went and leaned against the window; there was light enough from the stars to let her see the church and the white headstones round it, and the white foot-

path leading thither. She knew every inch of ground she looked upon, and loved it; the scene was not picturesque, but simple, homely, and so quiet. Nothing moving save the bony-looking leafless branches of the trees.

“They seem to be brushing the sky,” said Maud, to herself, and yet she was thinking of anything rather than the trees, if thinking could be called that bewildered consciousness of sorrow—of having been stupid in the past—and of having a blank for the future. “It will be all the same a hundred years hence,” soliloquized the poor thing—“all those people lying so tranquilly under the church walls, had heavy aching hearts at one time.” And then she felt something softly tickling her cheek, and putting up her cold hand she found hot tears rolling down her face. She at once tried a little dissimulation with herself as to their source. Poor mamma! had been hurt—and even grandmamma was sorry, everybody was sorry for her. Maud grew colder and colder with nervousness. She was fighting her first battle with sorrow, and she had a great longing to be comforted.

Urged by this desire, she got as far as the door, intending to go to her grandmother, then she drew back ashamed—what could she say? She took off her dress, put on her wrapper—and—she was very young of her age, not at all self-reliant, and so, she must be excused if, instead of lying awake and miserable all night, she crept away to Mrs. Lescrimière's room.

The old lady was not asleep. She was transgressing good rules, by reading in bed. The moment she

saw Maud, she laid aside her book and held out her arms without asking any questions. "I am so cold, grandmamma."

"Well, my child, no wonder if you run about in a November night, undressed. Put on that *douillette*, and wrap that shawl round your feet—draw your chair close to the bed and tell me what's the matter?"

"It's so difficult," began Maud in almost a whisper. "I feel, but I cannot explain—" then with a sob, "Oh! grandmamma, you and mamma think he does not care for me."

"You are dreaming, Maud; this is mere fancy. You'll see it is so, to-morrow."

"No, no, grandmamma. I think,—I think—it had all better be given up."

"Give up your lover—certainly—if you doubt him and yourself."

"I don't doubt myself. Grandmamma, if he had loved me, really, quite really you know, wouldn't he rather have been a little poor, than not have been married—do—pray do, tell me the truth, grandmamma."

"There's one sort of love that would undoubtedly have married in haste, Maud, not the best—not the most enduring—a fierce flame soon subsides into cold ashes. All that is to last long, takes time to build. Escott and you are only laying the foundations of what is to be the work of both your lives—more especially yours, to keep in good repair."

"But why should women always——" Maud hesitated—"always have to try and preserve a husband's affection?" Maud looked proud as she spoke.

"It ought to be equally necessary for a man to care about his wife."

"First of all, Maud, put this into your head; there's no such thing as equality in any shape in the world. Men don't love as women, they love as men. My dear, what could have induced Mr. Escott to ask you to marry him if he did not love you; happily for you, you are no heiress?"

Maud's eyes looked larger than ever with eagerness. "May I tell you all, grandmamma? You won't think ill of him, only I want so to be advised."

"Trust me, my child, I will be perfectly frank with you. Even though it may pain you."

In almost a whisper Maud said, "He is often rough to me, when I know I am doing right, helping mamma with the children, I mean, yet he is quite out of patience with me; and then, when we are alone, he yawns, and when I see that, I lose heart and grow stupid."

Mrs. Lescririère repressed a smile. "Yawning is not a very polite act, but an excusable one, in a man who has had hard or wearying work. I am sure it's a comfort to Escott to be able, or to fancy himself permitted, to yawn by your side. Do you mean to quarrel with your husband for gaping in your presence? I knew a man once who declared there was no friendship until yawning was not considered an offence."

"Grandmamma, a joke does not comfort one."

"My dear, I am far from joking; you don't wish me to tell you, do you, that this unlucky habit of Escott's is a proof he doesn't love you? I'll tell

you something else. He is a nervous man, and he shrinks from querulousness, or little self-lamentings, or small upbraidings."

Maud said, "Indeed, grandmamma, I never venture to find fault with him."

"No, not in words, but perhaps you have looked like a victim—nothing a man hates more—or been silent, or even resentful more by omission of kindness than commission of unkindness." Maud winced at the recollection of how she had turned away from his "God bless you." "You love him, you would break your little heart if you were to quarrel with him; then, my child, don't weigh his love against yours, be above that sort of bargaining, try to conform yourself to the exigencies of his nature without sacrificing a principle *bien entendu*. Maud . . ."

"If I only knew how to make him love me very, very much," persisted Maud, though her face and neck were in a blaze of scarlet at the avowal.

"As Orlando did Angelica?" laughed Mrs. Lescrimière: "child, child, make him happy by always showing him a placid, loving face; comfort him with cheerfulness and serenity, and he won't be able to live without you, though he does not fall at your feet to tell you so every day. Some people require cheerfulness in those they live with, to make up for their own deficiency in animal spirits. Escott, I am sure, has a very small pulse. You imagine he does not care whether you are pleased or not. Look at him when he comes to-morrow, he is too proud, or rather too sensitive to speak of regret or anxiety, but watch him."

Maud's face was hid in the bed-clothes, and she gave no answer.

"I have not heard all your misfortunes yet," continued Mrs. Lescrimière, in that cheerful voice which made Maud fancy that her grandmother could not understand her pitiful plight. "Don't let any sorrow eat your heart away, my dear, while you can be cured, or at least soothed, by a friend, a real friend." Mrs. Lescrimière patted her grandchild's head, and, drawing out a silken curl to its full length, said, "What pretty hair you have, my child."

The caress and the compliment unlocked the young heart, which had closed itself at the idea of its griefs being slighted. "Grandmamma! can a man love a woman very much, though she is not beautiful?"

"Yes, most assuredly. I have known men made inconstant by plain women."

"Really!" and Maud looked up, hoping for examples.

"My dear girl, I hope you are not going to ask me to explain what makes a man fall in love. You might as well ask me to explain why evil is permitted."

"No, grandmamma, it isn't that," and once more the face was buried in the counterpane—"but—but—I never see his eye on me . . . and he looks so much at other people."

"Ah! at me—or your mother, I don't know who else he has to gaze at," the truth suddenly flashed on the old lady—and she added, quickly, "or Mrs. Brown?"

Maud was silent; though Mrs. Lescrimière could

not see the flush, the girl was once more scarlet with shame—the instant the suspicion that had been lurking in her mind was put into words, Maud felt how unworthy it was of Escott and herself.

Mrs. Lescrimière remained silent also, her hand still resting on the bowed head of her granddaughter. When she spoke again, all liveliness had fled from her voice. She said,—

“I am so sorry for you, my poor little girl—so sorry. What years of suffering are in store for you, and for him too. You must be badly organized for happiness, Maud, if, on such a small pretext, you are jealous. I cannot help you, my dear child; convinced to-night of your folly, to-morrow you would be as full of doubts as ever.”

Maud, startled by the sentence thus passed on her, exclaimed, “Oh! grandmamma, if you only knew all I have heard, Mrs. Lonsdale ——”

“Stop, my dear—you remember Eve’s excuse—it was the serpent tempted me, and Adam’s—the woman gave it to me; we seek to throw the blame on others, when the deciding cause to evil-doing exists in ourselves. And, Maud, reflect on what you have done—in your thoughts you have accused the man you love, the man who has singled you out to be the companion of his life, who relies on your strength to be constant—constancy is not so easy, child—you have, confess it, believed him capable of trying to delay his marriage, because of his admiration for another woman—but no, you couldn’t believe this, or you would resign him at once. I am so sorry for you, my little girl,”

“You break my heart, grandmamma.” Maud was now sobbing like a repentant child. “I am growing wicked—I *am* wicked. I have been feeling so unkind to every one, as if I could not believe or trust any one—as if every one was a hypocrite.”

“For every one, read Escott and poor Mrs. Brown. You have been the only hypocrite yourself, Maud, in being civil to a woman whose eyes you could have torn out. Hopeless as your case is, my dear, I’ll give you one proof that Mrs. Brown is not meditating conquests—her dress. She has worn that one black dress ever since we have known her, and her bonnet looks as if it had come out of the Ark. Now kiss me, and go to bed—go to bed, child.”

Maud kissed her grandmother passionately,—“There’s no one like you, grandmamma, so good and so wise.”

When Maud was gone, Mrs. Lescrimière drew the bed-clothes about her, and muttered,—“*Ah, le bon vieux temps quand j’étais si malheureuse.*”



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWO SIDES OF THE SHIELD.

Escott had one of those reserved natures which cannot give confidence, but are happy to allow it to be taken. Maud did not understand this the least in the world, and when he did not enlarge on, or continue a subject, she retreated from it, believing that she thus showed a proper discretion; in short, had

she cared less to please him, she would have made him happier.

When he walked away from the rectory, Escott was thoroughly aware that he had mortified Maud by his hasty refusal of the college living; he was uncomfortable at having pained her, and vexed at her throwing back his parting blessing; and, comparing one thing and another, he ended where he began, by feeling that Maud was unreasonable.

“She would have been charmed with me if I had plunged her into difficulties, *that* would have been a proof of love.”

He was uncommonly out of conceit with love and marriage at that moment, and without any suspicion that some defect of temper in himself might justify doubts on Maud’s part as to his tenderness for her.

In this mood he overtook George Brown. The boy answered his greeting very drily; as they were going the same road they were companions perforce. Escott, having inquired for Mrs. Brown, said, “I am sorry that you come now so seldom to church. I have missed you there these three last Sundays. I expected greater perseverance from you.”

George laughed one of his reckless laughs, and replied, “I was a humbug, and I am sick of being one; and that’s the best thing I can say for myself. Neither you nor I know anything of the next world—we know little even of this present one,—and I don’t see the use of giving up all that is pleasant now for the chance of something better by-and-by. I was happy enough before you began teaching me religion, as you call it. I never did harm to any-

body, I liked everybody; you first taught me to dislike by your manner to me. I wish to heavens we had never seen this place. I hate, I abominate it, and every soul belonging to it. I shall never, never be happy any more.

Escott was surprised, almost dismayed at such an attack. George's frankness helped him out of his mail of reserve. "I cannot regret," said the curate, "having tried to bring you nearer to God, nor do I regret the loss of your former careless humour; it is a small price to pay for having been awakened to a knowledge of the love of our Saviour. George, I am sorry for any pain I may have given you; I ask you to forgive me, but I rejoice that I have stirred your soul from its deadly slumber; it can never sleep again; and you will, you must seek God—become in truth His child—I will pray for this always."

"Much you remember me, unless I happen to come across you," said George, fiercely. "You haven't put your foot within our doors for weeks—you haven't seen me when I have been within a yard of you. I am a humbug, you are a humbug, we are all humbugs together."

There was such real feeling in the boy's words and looks, that Escott was touched instead of offended; he said, soothingly, "My dear boy, your mother, in so many words, told me she did not care that I should see so much of you."

"My mother, my mother," repeated George, impatiently; "my mother, Mr. Escott, cares only for one thing in the world. She would sacrifice" (a pause) "fifty children for that one end."

Escott was too scrupulous to ask, "And what may that be?"

George went on, "She had no right to interfere between you and me—both of you to treat me as if I had no sense or will of my own. If I go wrong, I'll lay it at both your doors. Oh! how I wish I knew of somewhere to go and be quiet—out of every one's reach; and I'll manage it some day," concluded George, with a curious triumphant look at Escott.

Escott made a deprecatory gesture, as much as to say, What can I do in the matter? and walked on, reflecting, somewhat sadly, how it had happened that, meaning well, he seemed to dissatisfy everybody. He had vexed and mortified Maud, and now here was this boy, for whom he had an elder brother's interest, vehemently accusing him of having done him an injury. He was roused from his unpleasant reverie by George's beginning to whistle the obnoxious polka he had whistled the Sunday evening described in the first chapter. Escott turned and looked at George, and then perceived that the once jaunty air had vanished, the then apple-round cheeks were grown thin, and an indescribable air of suffering was imprinted on the short figure wrapped so closely in a cloak. Mrs. Lescrimière had said right, that George was looking ill.

"Don't you feel well?" asked Escott, kindly.

"Quite, thanks," was the off-hand answer. "Never had a doctor since I was two feet high—don't know or don't remember what illness is."

"I thought your mother came here for the sake of your health."

"If she did, she did not tell me so. Ah! here are the dear children from the rectory. No walking here without meeting them. Charlie with a dead rabbit, and tender-hearted Carry charmed with his prowess."

Carry ran to him whom she always called Dodge, and put her hand into his. "I don't love anybody to-day, Carry," George said, and with a "good-bye to you all," he walked off.

As Escott left the children at the same time, Carry had innocently made Maud believe that the curate and George had gone away together to the Hatch; and, upon this false foundation, Maud had raised a superstructure of jealousy. She, in fact, accused Escott of leaving her unhappy, and going to call and probably spend a pleasant evening with Mrs. Brown, as he had once before done.

Escott was a methodical man; therefore he employed his evening exactly as he had intended to do, previous to his interview with Maud and his meeting with George, although both incidents had unhinged him for that particular occupation—sermon-writing. His reasoning on his text was laboured, yet misty and confused; he was quite aware that there was a double current of thoughts running through his mind, and not keeping so clear of one another as do the waters of the Rhone and Lake Leman. He rated himself soundly for allowing his inner life to be so easily disturbed by things from without, and ended his meditations, and probably his sermon also, by a peroration as to the little we can do to render our friends happy, in comparison to the facility with

which we can make them unhappy. And his conclusion was that, of all the causes of domestic discomfort, none was greater than that of temper; that often, what we dignify to ourselves as timidity of our own powers of pleasing, is mere bad humour, born of mortified vanity; and that it would be well, if we all kept in mind that, when anguish of soul or body overtakes our dearest, not one pang, not one agony can we spare them; no, not though we poured out our blood like water for them; and therefore, if we would spare ourselves hopeless remorse, we must strive never to be voluntarily the instrument to stab, or the cloud to darken the lives of our friends.

No man relishes his infallibility being called in question, and Escott was one of those described by somebody as born without a skin. Maud's unlucky coldness he viewed as an indirect censure; he never dreamed that she might believe she had cause to think him indifferent. Maud and he were looking at the same circumstance from opposite sides. It was the old story of the Knights and the Shield.

It is a bad business when we destroy the confidence of any one we love as to our kindly reception of them, when our presence is entered with a dread as to the mood in which we may be found. Such a long period must elapse before former confidence revives. Escott had very little will to go to the rectory, and it is possible he might have left Maud to her reflections for some twenty-four hours longer, had he not felt it an imperative duty to explain to Mr. Greatorex the reasons which had made him refuse the living offered to him. On his way, he called at

the Hatch. Hans made him understand that Mrs. Brown was not well, and that the young gentleman was out. Escott, who wished very much to have seen George, left his card and walked on, wondering if this denial were not one of Mrs. Brown's precautionary measures against his seeing her son.

Maud, as will be easily believed, had been on the watch for his arrival, and her heart fluttered in quite an unknown manner when she heard the click of the gate and the familiar step in the porch. He must find her looking pleased. His eyes sought her anxiously as he came into the room, and then, with a low sigh of relief, he turned to speak to the other ladies. There had been no responding smile to Maud's; and then she realized that always hitherto he had met her with a smile. Her heart grew heavy.

"Well, Walter," exclaimed Mrs. Greatorex, "so you are determined against love in a cottage."

"Or rather, against a cottage without love; that's what generally happens in the case of people not accustomed to live in cottages;" put in Mrs. Lescrimière quickly.

Mr. Greatorex, who had been busy with his plants in the conservatory, catching sight of Escott, entered the drawing-room.

"I have come to talk over this letter with you," said Escott.

"Jedburgh justice," said Mr. Greatorex, "hanged first, and judged afterwards. As you and Maud have already settled the matter, I think I'll reserve my advice for next time. You have a good and wise counsellor in this little girl," patting Maud's shoulder.

"She is clear of all responsibility," said Escott, who was not one to creep out of any difficulty. "I sent my refusal before mentioning to her the offer of the living."

"Well, she acquiesced in the decision, and that comes to the same thing."

No use to strive after a connected conversation at the rectory during the day. Before Escott could reply, three boys had rushed into the room through three different doors.

Escott had not yet spoken to Maud. More from habit than from any wish for a *tête-à-tête*, he asked her if she were going out to walk. She said yes, with great alacrity—but the walk was not a happy one to her. She had self-control enough to maintain the cheerfulness advised by her grandmother, but she was faint-hearted then, and for many a day, for many an ensuing week. She came to doubt if ever she and Escott would be on the same terms as before her one sulky fit. So trifling to be sure, the effect seemed so beyond the cause—ay, but only a spark is required to fire the gunpowder which blows up the fortress.

This is perhaps the explanation. Escott had known Maud for two years, seen her daily, and never once had beheld her ruffled; he had believed her to possess the serenity of an angel; her placidity was his balm. He required it; it was what had attracted him to her. All of a sudden, on the first occasion, as it seemed to him, that she was tried by a personal incident, she failed. His disappointment was acute, for he fancied that the foundation on which he had built his happiness was of sand.

“What is to come of us, if she is easily piqued,” thought Escott. Had he consulted Mrs. Lescrimière, she would have comforted him by saying, that Maud had the good temper of a woman, and not of an angel.

The uncomfortable lovers had a glimpse of George Brown during their walk. Escott shouted to him to come and join them; but George was deaf as an adder to the invitation.



CHAPTER XIX.

ONE EYE-WITNESS IS BETTER THAN TEN HEARSAYS.

It was the twentieth of December: the next day was St. Thomas's feast, which in Eden and the neighbouring parishes is called Gooding-day, an anniversary when it is the custom for the wives and daughters of the whole population of labourers, singly or in bands, to go to gentlemen's residences and to the larger farm-houses, to collect money or receive gifts of some kind.

Mrs. Greatorex was in the habit of bestowing shawls, petticoats, jackets, and stockings befitting the season; some of her purchases were still to make, for she had delayed going to Z—— until the day she could take out the clothing-club money from the savings' bank.

Mrs. Lescrimière alone accompanied her, for Maud had to assist the governess in making the wreaths

for the Christmas decorations of the church, the younger ones had to search for holly with red berries, and Mr. Greatorex had various matters connected with the joyous season to arrange.

In a narrow road, about half way between Eden and Z——, the rectory brougham passed a railway cab, out of which a little thin old man with bright blue eyes popped his head, as it seemed with some intention of thrusting it into the Greatorex's carriage.

"I wonder who he took us for," exclaimed Mrs. Greatorex, "and where he is going?"

The cab stopped at the "Fife," the only public-house in Eden; the little old gentleman—he must have been seventy—ran into the bar, as if he were in a prodigious hurry, and asked for a glass of beer. While drinking it, he inquired if there were many gentlemen's families residing in the village. The man who had served him was surly and taciturn, so the old gentleman skipped back again to his cab, no wiser about the neighbourhood than when he skipped out. But just then the Greatorex's children were passing, and, as they always took it for granted that every carriage that came to Eden must be bound to their house, they stopped and stared.

Charlie, who was not deficient in curiosity or initiative, drew near to the cab, and called out to the driver, "Do you want to be shown the way to the rectory?"

"Hullo! youngster," cried the old gentleman, "you know all the people hereabouts, don't you?"

"I rather expect I do," returned Charlie, tossing up the knife he had in his hand, and catching it again.

“ Well, what’s their names ? ”

“ Tell me the first letter of the one you are wanting,” retorted Charlie, “ there’s a whole alphabet of them here ; I couldn’t go through such a lot in a breath.”

“ What’s your own letter ? ” asked the old man.

“ Mine ! let’s see. I declare I forget ; ” and the boy ran laughing away. The old man laughed too, and bid the driver go on to the rectory.

The stranger’s appearance puzzled James. Servants in general guess the station of visitors instantly, but the rector’s man hesitated where to class this stranger. The head belonged to a gentleman, the body did not ; the features of the face were good—a high broad forehead, sharp clear blue eyes, a broad bridged nose ; the mouth fallen in from want of teeth, but pleasant ; the hair sparse, grey, and brushed up to add all the height possible to the diminutive stature. The shirt-collar was limp, not very white ; the shirt-front speckled with snuff ; the black coat and the other appendages, not threadbare, but rusty and dusty, and covered with what looked like dog’s hairs ; the feet large and flat, in thin shoes that had been mended.

“ An undertaker,” thought James, “ or a genteel beggar.”

“ Tell your master that Mr. Twyford from London wishes to see him.” The stranger’s voice dissipated James’s theories ; the queer-looking old fellow must be a gentleman ; James took the message, and in a minute returned and ushered Mr. Twyford into the rector’s comfortable library.

Mr. Greatorex was a shy, reserved man; contact with strangers was always disagreeable to him: he remained standing after Mr. Twyford's entrance—a hint that he hoped the interview might not last long.

Mr. Twyford was very much at his ease, took up a stand on the hearthrug, stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and said, "A very snug retreat, sir—capital engraving that of St. Peter's—you, like myself, have been to Rome, I suppose—as the folks over the duck-pond say, all roads lead to Rome. Not much faith in the politics of Italy's big brother—have you? fighting for an idea—trash—fighting to keep himself on his throne of bayonets—pleasant seat."

"May I beg you to state to what I owe the pleasure of your visit," said Mr. Greatorex.

"Very true," replied this lively little old man—thrusting his hands deep into one of his pockets—of course not into the one in which was the article he was seeking. "Very true; I think it must have been your son I met at the entrance of this village—a fine sharp fellow—sharp as a needle—born to cut out his own way." The rector's face relaxed, and he was not so much on his guard as five minutes previously. By that time Mr. Twyford had one of those leather cases in his hand which generally enclose a miniature; this he opened, saying, "Are you acquainted with, or have you ever seen, the original of this portrait?"

James had plenty of time allowed him for wondering what that "old fogey's" business could be.

Mr. Twyford stayed a full hour with the rector; wine and sandwiches were carried into the library, and James reported to the kitchen, "there was bad news upstairs, master was looking so awful put out." Nurse opined, it was "some of them beastly Christmas bills;" and cook observed, "Everything comed out one day or t' other; for her part, she shouldn't wonder at anything."

James distinctly heard the old gentleman's parting words to Mr. Greatorex as they were going towards the front door, which James was holding open. The old gentleman said, "After all, it's the best thing that could happen to her, better a finger off than always wagging."

When Mr. Twyford was gone, Mr. Greatorex went away up the hill, from whence he could command a view of the Z—— road. As soon as he saw the well-known brougham approaching, he turned homewards, and was in time to hand his wife and mother-in-law out of the carriage. "Come into the library," he said to them, "I have something to tell you." He put aside the children who had clustered round the two ladies.

"What's wrong?" exclaimed Mrs. Greatorex; "something; I see it in your face."

"Disagreeable, certainly, but sit down, I can't explain it to you in five minutes. I have had a visit from a London lawyer."

"What on earth about?" asked Mrs. Greatorex, beginning to be alarmed; she had, as most women have, a vague fear of lawyers' letters and lawyers' visits.

“He came about Mrs. Brown.”

The rector spoke with visible reluctance. Mrs. Greatorex clapped her hands together and exclaimed, —“I always expected it.”

“Expected what?” said the rector, querulously for him.

Mrs. Greatorex had not the courage to explain.

“She has been an ill-used woman, Louisa,” continued the rector, “and that’s the worst I have heard of her.”

“But how came this London lawyer to know of her being in Eden?” asked Mrs. Lescrimière.

“By the merest chance. Miss Cox began it. You remember Broadwood, the school inspector—he and Mrs. Brown lunched here the day of the examination, and he was uncommonly struck by her appearance—he told me then he was sure he had met her somewhere, not long before. Broadwood happens to be Twyford’s nephew, and it turns out that he had seen a miniature, a capital likeness of Mrs. Brown, now in Twyford’s possession, and which is one of the means by which they were trying to trace her.”

“Who is trying to trace her, and why?” questioned Mrs. Lescrimière.

“The police are looking out for her; she is wanted as a witness to identify a Mr. Edward Bouverie, who is under a charge of bigamy.”

Mrs. Greatorex gave a significant glance of reproach at her mother, and said, drily, “I hope our unlucky acquaintance with Mrs. Brown is not to take us all into a witness-box.”

“My dear woman,” said Mr. Greatorex, soothingly,

ingly, "do remember that misfortune does not mean crime."

"Of course not," replied Mrs. Greatorex, "but there are cases that are like pitch, and one would prefer to keep clear of having anything, past, present, or future, to do with them."

"You will not, nor any of us, be involved in this poor lady's trouble," returned Mr. Greatorex. "My interview with Mr. Twyford will not lead to that."

"I don't think it very gentlemanly of Mr. Broadwood to return our hospitality by betraying our guests," said Mrs. Greatorex hotly, and with about as much reason as any of us exhibit when we are uncommonly vexed and a trifle frightened. "And," added the lady, "what need was there to trouble you, when Mr. Broadwood had told where Mrs. Brown could be found."

"If you could manage to be a little reasonable, and a little patient, my dear, I would try to tell you what I gathered from Mr. Twyford."

When Mr. Greatorex used that form of speech, "my dear," his wife knew that she must not put his equanimity to any further stretch. After pausing a moment to verify the chance of obtaining a fair hearing, the rector began, "The first thing Mr. Twyford wanted of me was the assurance that the person resembling the miniature he showed me did live in the village, and also to make certain of the denomination under which she was known. Broadwood had not been sure of either fact, any more than he had been able to recollect, when here, where it was he had seen Mrs. Brown."

"I don't see that you were obliged to answer such questions," interrupted Mrs. Lescrimière.

"If, by doing so, I had betrayed any confidence, certainly I should not have done so," said the rector; "indeed I heartily wish the alternative had not been placed in my power, for I am half afraid I yielded in some measure from a desire to avoid any chance of being put into that witness-box Louisa so dreads, and which, I must own, Mr. Twyford rather hinted at."

"Perhaps you will not escape even now," sighed his wife.

"I answered both queries," continued the rector; "I did not, in fact, see what reason I could give for a refusal. I added that nothing could have been more respectable or unoffending than Mrs. Brown's life since she became my parishioner. Mr. Twyford said he could quite believe it, from some letters he had read, written by that lady. Then I asked him to tell me (unless there was some paramount reason against it) what was Mrs. Brown's history, saying, that as the ladies of my own family were acquainted with her, I was doubly interested in the matter. He answered that the story was already public property; that there had been a preliminary examination, reported as usual in the papers, and therefore the particulars were at my service. It seems that a certain Mr. Bouverie, some score of years ago, when a young, dashing, handsome man, married a rich elderly spinster, a Miss Milford, of course every one but herself knew, for her money. After a very few years, she got uncomfortable and suspicious of his frequent absences from home—he

was bitten, it seemed, by a mania for travelling, and on one pretext or another disembarrassed himself of his wife's company. When he did live with her, he behaved kindly, and thus maintained his influence over her affections. At last, one day, a letter addressed in pretty female writing was forwarded to their country house: he was not at home, and she, sheltering herself under the excuse of the word 'immediate' on the cover, opened it; there was an enclosure directed to Edward Brooke, and again the word "immediate." With the sharp instinct of a jealous woman, and in spite of the change of name, Mrs. Bouverie broke the second seal, on which, by-the-by, was the name Felicia; the letter was from a wife to a husband—every word was proof of that, let alone the signature of 'Your own loving wife, Felicia'—there was in it a prayer to come to her directly, as their darling was ill. There must have been allusions, conveying certainty to Mrs. Bouverie of the wrong that had been done her, for she proceeded at once to ransack her husband's desk and writing-table, and even broke open an *escritoire* in his dressing-room. In this last piece of furniture it was that she discovered a few faded letters and the miniature Twyford showed me, and which cannot have been painted long, it is so wonderfully like the original. I don't know whether Mr. and Mrs. Bouverie met after her marauding, but Twyford told me, she went to her sister's son, who is also her heir-at-law, gave him the letters and the picture, saying that she trusted to him to see her righted and protected. This gentleman was nothing loth to act against the husband, whom he considered as his rival for his aunt's

property. Twyford was consulted, and the police were set to work.

“You should have seen the old lawyer’s face,” said the rector, interrupting his narration, “his cheeks burned and his eyes glowed as he described the way in which a chain of evidence had been procured; he looked just as men do when recounting a good day’s sport. He went on to say, that they held the two ends of the tangled skein—the date of the first letter from Penrith, and that of the last from Heidelberg—strange, he said, how men *do* keep proofs against themselves; it’s as if the father of crimes prompted them to their own undoing. Had Mr. Bouverie destroyed that bit of paper, I don’t see how we were to have traced out the marriage between an Edward Brooke and a Felicia Heaphy. The first letter was evidently one from a bride; and, with that as a clue, we found the register of a marriage at the parish church of Penrith, between two persons of those names, represented as bachelor and spinster. The clergyman who solemnized the marriage was dead and so were the clerk and the other witness. But through the day-books of a grocer for the same year as the marriage, we discovered where Mr. and Mrs. Brooke had lodged in Penrith. The landlady had also died in the interim, but her daughter remembered hearing her mother talk about the runaway couple who had been married first at Gretna, and then afterwards by banns at Penrith.”

“An elopement!” exclaimed Mrs. Greatorrex. “I was not so far wrong, you see, when I said there was always a fault somewhere in misfortune.”

“Louisa, for heaven’s sake,” said her mother; “do you understand the spirit of the gospel you read so diligently? Your proposition would lead to some strange results.”

“The imprudence of a young girl,” observed Mr. Greator, “(and admitting Mrs. Brown to be the heroine of Mr. Twyford’s story, she must have been very young at that date), can scarcely deserve so harsh a sentence as yours, Louisa. Think also how many, who have been highly esteemed members of society, committed the same error at the beginning of their career. However, let me finish what little more I have to say. The daughter of the landlady and the son of the defunct grocer believed that after the lapse of more than sixteen years they could still identify Mr. and Mrs. Brooke, and agreed to appear as witnesses whenever called upon. In the meantime, an agent had been despatched to Heidelberg (from whence you recollect the letter marked “immediate” was dated), and had no difficulty in finding the furnished villa that had been tenanted for a twelvemonth by a family of the name of Brooke. The agent managed to see and satisfy himself that Mrs. Brooke must be the original of the miniature. Mr. Brooke was not then at the villa. There appeared to be no mystery about the Brookes—the tradespeople, as their bills were regularly paid, entertained no suspicions against their respectability. However, Twyford and the police considered that they had sufficient grounds to form a strong presumption that Bouverie and Brooke were one and the same, and they obtained a warrant for Mr. Bouverie’s apprehension. The same agent re-

turned to Heidelberg to subpoena Mrs. Brooke and others as witnesses to identify Mr. Bouverie; but, between the agent's first and second visit, Mrs. Brooke had given up the villa, and she and her servants had gone no one knew whither. She was tracked as far as Frankfort, and there they lost all trace of her.

"The witnesses from Penrith, as might have been expected, could not swear to Mr. Bouverie's identity with Mr. Brooke—the grocer's son said the man he remembered was half a head taller than Mr. Bouverie; the Germans could not agree as to Mr. Brooke's complexion. The one said he was dark, the other fair. There was the set-off against these discrepancies of testimony in the similarity between the usual writing of the accused and that of the signature in the Penrith church register, and the facts of the possession of the miniature and the first letter. The magistrate refused to consider these as deposits left by any Edward Brooke, and Mr. Bouverie was committed for trial at the ensuing Michaelmas term; but the case was adjourned to January, that is, next month, to give the prosecution time to hunt up Mrs. Brooke. Twyford ended by saying he was beginning to shake in his shoes, when Broadwood so providentially fell in with Mrs. Brown here, and supplied the missing link."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Lescrimière, "it puts me out of all patience to hear the use, or rather abuse of that word providential. Your lawyer was nearer right when he attributed such discoveries to diabolical malignity. I think it is rather hard, supposing Mrs. Brown to be Mr. Bouverie's victim, they should insist on her coming forward to expose

her own misfortune. I think she is quite right to keep out of the way by any means short of suicide."

"You forget the cause of justice," said Mrs. Greatorex.

"Injustice, I call it," said the old lady, "asking a woman in a manner to criminate herself—to hold up a picture of her agony to the public, and all to gratify another woman's pique. If it were to re-establish a fair fame, *à la bonne heure*; my dear soul! talk of law as much as you like, but not of justice; justice belongs to a diviner tribunal than an earthly one."

"Her disappearing so opportunely tells very much against Mrs. Brown," observed Mrs. Greatorex; "and I confess I cannot bring myself to believe that any woman can have been deceived for sixteen or seventeen years."

"Yet Mrs. Bouverie was," answered Mrs. Lescrimière, quickly; "and, sharp as she has since shown herself, you make no difficulty as to her."

Mrs. Greatorex turned a deaf ear to this remark, and said, "Did Mr. Twyford say nothing about the boy?"

"Well, he knew there was a child, but he had fancied it was a girl."

Mrs. Greatorex sat thoughtful for a moment, then said, "It's a queer mess altogether; but what is going to be done next?"

"Mrs. Brown is to receive a subpœna to-morrow. It was to be quite sure of the name she now goes by that principally brought Twyford on to Eden. He must employ the Z—— police, it seems, in the matter."

"She will never go," said Mrs. Lescrimière. "I would not, in her place."

"I imagine there must be some way of compelling a reluctant witness to appear," said the rector, "that is, if you once catch your hare."

"You may take a horse to the water, but you can't force him to drink," returned Mrs. Lescrimière pugnaciously; "if she ever cared for the man, she won't speak against him, take my word for it—women are great fools, we all know."

"I am not much of a lawyer," returned the rector, laughing at the old lady's admissions in the heat of argument—she who at other times defended with such vehemence the superiority of women—"I am not much of a lawyer, but I know of cases in which the witness refusing to answer before a judge or magistrate may be committed to prison for contempt, and the imprisonment may be continued at the discretion of the judge until the witness yields."

"Then I would stay there till I died, before I yielded," said Mrs. Lescrimière.

"Mamma!" here interrupted Carry's voice.

"Carry!" exclaimed father and mother in a breath; how came you here?"

"Anne sent me to tell mamma that dinner was going in."

"Why didn't you speak before?"

"I was waiting for papa and grandmamma to be done talking."

None of them liked to ask her how much she had heard and understood; whatever it was, it could not be helped now.

CHAPTER XX.

ILL NEWS TRAVELS APACE.

DINNER was unusually silent; the rector was, exactly as James had described it, awfully put out—Mrs. Greatorex too engrossed by what she had so recently heard and some private speculations of her own, to be inclined to talk of anything but Mrs. Brown's story, and so all the keeping up of appearances before the servants was left to Mrs. Lescrimière. She talked to Maud, who as yet knew nothing of what had occurred.

Charlie's first question at dessert was, "What did that queer old fellow want with you, papa?"

"He came on business."

"Tell us, mother, do," whispered Charlie, laying his handsome head on his mother's arm.

"Really on business, child."

"Yes, papa said that, but what business?"

"Boys and girls should not be curious."

"Should grown people?"

"Nonsense, Charlie, you must learn patience."

"Be quiet, Charles," said the rector. When papa called him Charles, the boy knew he must obey, just as mamma did when she heard the ominous "my dear."

As they were going into the drawing-room, Escott came in, and Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex took him and Maud into the library, that they might be made acquainted with what had happened, without danger of the children's sharp ears hearing that which was not intended for them. Mrs. Lescrimière remained in

the drawing-room to read her paper; Charlie, Carry, and Willie were seated as usual round the centre table.

Presently Mrs. Lescrimière was roused from a deeply interesting article on foreign policy, by a hubbub among the children, and Carry came to her, saying, "Grandmamma, may I ask you a question?"

"To be sure."

"Are Mrs. Brown and George wicked people?" Carry's face was a deep red as she put her question.

"My dear child, what can have put such an idea into your head?"

"Charlie says they are going to be taken up and that only bad people are put in prison."

"I don't know where Charlie got his information, my dear, but he is not right in what he supposes."

"I told him, grandmamma, I heard papa saying Mrs. Brown was to get a summons to-morrow, and Charlie said he knew that meant the police taking up a person. Jim Stiles got a summons for stealing Mr. Earl's apples, and was put in prison."

"Sometimes a summons does end in carrying people to prison, Carry; but often it is only a way of asking some one to give information about a person that is suspected of having done wrong, do you understand? I might have been summoned to tell of Jim Stiles if I had seen him actually taking the apples—Mrs. Brown is wanted to tell something she knows."

"Then why did papa say, she might be put in prison?"

"Because poor Mrs. Brown does not wish to tell tales of some one she cares about. You wouldn't like to tell anything that would have grandmamma or

papa dreadfully punished, would you? You would rather go to prison yourself, I am sure."

The little girl's lips quivered at the mere possibility of such terrible contingencies.

"Come here, boys," continued Mrs. Lescrimière, "and I will tell you all a story of how a good woman was put in prison for doing a kind action."

The children seated themselves on footstools in a semicircle before their grandmother, and prepared for that supremest enjoyment of child-life—the being told a story. "When I was a little girl as young as Carry," began Mrs. Lescrimière, "my mother wanted to go to Paris to join my father, who had been obliged to stop there."

"Why?" asked Charlie.

"Because the emperor ordered him to do so—for you all know my father was a Frenchman—and it was very difficult for us to go to him, for the same emperor who would not let him come to England, would not let the English go to France."

"The English licked the French, though," again interrupted Charlie.

"I shall not go on," said Mrs. Lescrimière, "if you stop me again."

"Charlie, be quiet, *do*," came from Carry and Willie.

"It was very difficult then," continued grand-mamma, "for us to get to Paris; we went in a smuggling vessel first to Holland, and one of our fellow-passengers was a beautiful lady."

"Just like Mrs. Brown, I daresay," observed Carry in an aside.

“This lady called herself Madame Girard—we did not know her real name for a long time. Well, she confided to my mother that she was carrying letters and money to Prince Polignac, and this prince was a great friend of the Bourbons, and an enemy to Napoleon. Madame Girard asked my mother to help her to hide some of the letters, and my mother said I was such a brave girl, that I wouldn’t be afraid to carry one—and so they put it into the foot of one of my stockings the morning we landed.”

“And what would those bad French have done to you, grandmamma, if they had found you out?”

“Put my mother and myself in prison,” was the reply.

Carry gave a nod full of meaning to Charlie.

“Madame Girard did not travel with us,” went on Mrs. Lescrimière, “but she had my father’s direction in Paris, and she was to come and fetch her letters as soon as she knew we were there. We got to Boulogne very well—nobody troubled us on the road—but when we arrived there, a person came and told my mother she must go to the Hôtel de Ville—the town-hall—and I was left all alone at the hotel. I had heard that many ladies and gentlemen had been called away just as my mother had been, and that they had never come back; and I sat looking out of a window, and thinking what I would do; if my mother didn’t come back, and if gendarmes were to take me to prison, and I wondered if I should be brave enough not to tell Madame Girard’s secret. I thought I would rather die than be so

cowardly—after all one can only die once. By-and-by my mother returned; she was very pale; all she told me then was, that we must stay at Boulogne for two days. At night she whispered to me, keeping her head and mine under the bed-clothes, that the police took her for some one else, and they wouldn't let her go, till they had heard from Paris. She bid me never ask questions, nor talk of our affairs, for that almost every servant in the hotel was a government spy. On the third day she went away again; but this time it was all right, my father had interest with some great people, and we were allowed to set off for Paris."

"And were you always wearing the same stockings?"

"No, but I had the letter always in one of my stockings. Madame Girard came to see us immediately after we reached Paris—and we gave her the letters we had smuggled for her. She told us where she lived, but said it would perhaps be better if we did not visit one another. She kissed me, thanked my mother, and bid us good-bye.

"Well, it might have been a week after, there came a great ring at our house bell, and a man who looked like a giant to me came into the room where my mother was sitting. She was at that moment hearing me my lessons. 'You are Madame Louise de Loricourt, I believe?' were his first words to my mother. My father's brother was in the room also; he turned pale, for he believed she was going to be arrested. The tall stranger begged to speak to her alone, and she, I see her now, quite calmly nodded

to my uncle and me, as much as to say, go—which we did. Presently she came to my father's apartment, where we were with him, and told us it was not an *agent de police*—I mean not a policeman, but a friend of Madame Girard; and he had come to ask my mother to try and warn Madame Girard that she was in danger, and had better get out of Paris, and indeed of France, as fast as possible.

“‘And how are you to manage this, Louise?’ said my father to my mother. ‘To begin with, I shall not allow you to go yourself—you are already suspected enough.’ ‘No,’ answered my mother, ‘to go myself would be running useless risks. I thought of sending Mathilde,’ meaning me,” explained Mrs. Lescrimière. “‘Can you and will you, my little girl?’ asked my father, drawing me to his knee. ‘There will be no danger to a child, and if you have courage to run in the dusk to Madame Girard, you may save the poor lady from a prison.’

“I was very proud to be trusted, and said I would go. So when it was nearly dark, my mother put me on my bonnet and cloak, gave me the message to Madame Girard, making me repeat it several times, so as to be sure I should remember it, and then my father took his hat, went downstairs with me, and through the front court, that the concierge might not think it strange I should go out alone. Then he left me at the corner of our street, telling me which way I was to turn. Madame Girard did not live far from us. I reached her safely, but there was a visitor with her. I said my mother had sent me to see her, and sat down quietly by her side.

The visitor did not speak to me, but I caught his eye on me every time I looked up. Madame Girard laughed and talked a great deal with him, and took no notice or very little of me, and I was beginning to be frightened that I should have to go home without giving her my message, when she turned round and said she would take me to play with a neighbour's little girl till my mother came to fetch me. I thought she was making a pretence, you know, so I did not say my mother was not coming. As soon as we were alone, she asked me in quite a whisper what it was, and I whispered back the words my mother had told me. She gave a great sigh and said, 'Go home and tell your mother that I am sure the man you saw in my salon is a police agent; and if she hears no more of me, she may believe I am in prison.'

"And was she put in prison, grandmamma?" burst from the three children.

"Yes; and none of her friends allowed to see or even speak through a grating to her. She might have had her liberty if she would have told the names of those who had sent the letters and the money to the prince."

"And did she never get out?" asked Charlie.

"Not for a very long while, and then her health was so broken, she very soon died."

Grandmamma did not point the moral of her tale, but left it to work its own way.

That night, Carry, instead of falling asleep as soon as her head was on the pillow, lay awake, troubled by one great longing—to do as grandmamma had done

by the French lady—to go and warn poor Mrs. Brown that she was to be taken up next day. Her fancy pictured the beautiful lady who had always been so kind to her, in a shocking prison with chains on. Carry remembered having seen a man who had just come out of jail, and he had had a red mark all round his head; it was only the mark of a tight hat, but Carry had supposed it to be that of some iron ring to which he had been fastened; this image became more vivid and distressing every moment. And then Dodge—Carry loved Dodge as truly and entirely as if she had been twenty instead of eleven; for her he was the most perfect of boys, accomplished, handsome, above all, unhappy. Quite a woman in that, this last trait was the most attractive of all. Carry's heart swelled at the picture she drew for herself of George's grief and desolation at his mother's being taken to prison. What was to come of Dodge without a mother, it was appalling to think of; what a courageous little girl her grandmamma had been to go about a great town by herself! Streets had lamps, to be sure, but the moon was so bright to-night, Carry had remarked it as she came up to bed—it was almost as bright as day.

A great resolution was maturing in Carry's mind, a heroic resolution, if her age and sex be considered. She got out of bed, huddling on her clothes as best she might; she put on her cloak and hat, and then she knelt down to say a prayer, to beg God to spread His wings over her—this image suggested by the print of the guardian angel with the outstretched sheltering wings, which hangs opposite to Carry's bed.

“There are no wild beasts in England, I know,” soliloquized the little girl as she crept down the back stairs. No one in the passages, the servants were at supper, and she could hear Maud playing Mozart. Out into the backyard; here Hector, the big black Newfoundland, left loose at night, nearly knocked her over by uncouth caresses. As soon as Carry opened the gate, Hector dashed through, and went leaping and frolicking along the road. “Perhaps God has sent him to take care of me; I never thought of him myself,” said the little girl.

While Carry was in the road that skirted the rectory garden, she was not frightened; it was different when she neared the old yew-trees, which even in the day made all about them gloomy—the grave-stones, too, showed so ghastly. What was that dreadful black thing jumping in the churchyard? She turned hot, then cold, and beads of moisture stood on her brow—the black thing was coming towards her—ah!—why, it was only Hector.

The church was passed, and Carry was in the avenue of ash-trees, which runs across the Lea. Here she began to sing to herself in a low voice one of the Sunday hymns; her voice was not very steady—there were so many sounds about, so many more than in the day. The mere crack of a branch or a twirl along her path of a dried leaf, or mutter of wind among the hills, were sounds of menace and dread to the little heroine. Her heart grew fuller and fuller, her courage waxed fainter and fainter, but she persevered; at last she saw the white palings of the Hatch garden; then she ran—ran until she stopped

breathless at the door, and rang the bell in her excitement, she did not know how violently. It brought Mrs. Brown, George, Hans, all into the hall.

"Don't open the door, Hans," cried the lady, turning the colour of ashes; "ask first who is there."

The door was always kept locked, and the chain up; Hans had therefore to unlock it; and then, without removing the chain, he opened the door about two inches, and showing the point of his long nose, asked in English that sounded like German, "Who is there?"

"It is only I, Mr. Hans," said a child's voice; "pray let me in."

"Gott im Himmel!" cried the old man, "it is de Pffarrer's little tochter," and he instantly undid the chain, and almost lifted Carry into the hall. "Was is de matt'r, poor Kind."

"Oh! Mrs. Brown," and here Carry's fortitude gave way, and she began most unheroically to cry.

"My dear little friend, come and tell me what has brought you here to-night;" and Mrs. Brown and George, each taking one of her hands, led Carry into the drawing-room.

"A glass of orange-flow'r wat'r do her good," said Hans, "poor little Fräulein."

"She is shaking with cold," said Mrs. Brown, rubbing the frozen hands.

"Come, Carry, and sit down on the fender stool with me," said George, and he drew her down beside him. "Now, off with the hat, and let's hear the melancholy story."

"Oh! Dodge, Dodge," and her arms were round

his neck, her words broken by sobs; "they are coming to take your mamma to prison; an old man came and told papa so to-day—and oh! pray, Mrs. Brown, you must make haste and go away—they are coming to-morrow."

George started to his feet; Mrs. Brown laid her finger on her lips. "And you came out alone at night without any one sending you to tell me this?" asked Mrs. Brown, kneeling down to the trembling child.

"Yes;" and Carry laid her own face against the pale beautiful one gazing at her so earnestly. "Grandmamma was braver than me once."

"God bless her and you, Carry. God make you like her, dear Carry, and then children will rise up and call you blessed also."

"Trinken, my little tear," urged Hans, who had brought her a glass of eau de fleur d'oranges.

"I must go home," said Carry; "they will be frightened if they miss me. Oh! I don't know what will you do. I am so sorry," and the tears began again to roll over her cheeks. "I can't bear Dodge to go away, indeed I can't."

"Poor angel!" said Mrs. Brown softly; "you must go home, darling, and Hans shall go with you."

"Will you be safe without him?" asked Carry.

"He won't be long," said Mrs. Brown, "and now, dear child, you will go away, I am sure, for you know I must have a good deal to do." Mrs. Brown kissed her often; the child clung in agony to Dodge, who rather permitted than returned her parting embrace. Indeed ever since Carry had told her errand, he had remained

like one petrified, taking no part in the inquiries—not even bidding farewell to his little loving friend.

Hans made Carry run almost all the way home, leaving her at the beginning of the rectory wall. As none of the doors were ever locked until the rector did so himself, the last thing before going to his bed, Carry had no difficulty in gaining admittance by the back gate and door. When she went out, the servants were at supper; when she returned they were in the drawing-room at prayers—so she easily slipped up unobserved to her room.

She was scarcely again in bed, before her mother came in, on her nightly round to see all her children. Carry had buried her head in her pillow; she could not have met her mother's eye without confessing what she had done.

“Dear me! how untidy that Mary is,” observed Mrs. Greatorex, “leaving all the child's clothes unfolded.”



CHAPTER XXI.

THE WOUND IS GREAT, BECAUSE IT IS SO
SMALL.

ABOUT a quarter of an hour before the bell rang for morning prayers, there was a little tap at Mr. Greatorex's private study door, and Carry putting in her head asked, “May I come in, papa?”

“Yes, my dear; why, little woman, what is the matter?” Carry was pale, heavy-eyed, and shaking from head to foot.

"Oh! Papa——" and she went and laid her head on his breast, "don't be angry with me. I went and told Mrs. Brown to go away."

"No; did you really, my darling?" said the rector, looking quite pleased, and speaking in a most satisfied voice. "Why, when did you manage that?"

"Last night, papa. I could not go to sleep for thinking of poor Dodge, if they took away his mother; so I got up and dressed, and ran there." At the recollection of the over-night's terrors and sorrows, Carry's voice died away in a broken whisper.

"There, there, don't cry, you did it for the best. But I say, Carry, what put it into your head to be in such a hurry?"

"I heard what you and grandmamma said about taking up Mrs. Brown, papa, and Charlie said she was to be put in prison—and oh! papa, I am so sorry . . ." Then, in a very tremulous whisper, she added, "Dodge is to write to me, Mrs. Brown promised."

Mr. Greatorrex thought his little girl was fretting lest she had done wrong; so, waiving that rather intricate question, he said, rather in the tone of a fellow conspirator—"Do you think they can have got away, Carry."

"I have not heard any carriage pass. Oh! papa, do you think mamma will be angry with me?" Carry knew without having been told that mamma was not inclined to be so kind to Mrs. Brown as papa was.

"No, no, mamma won't be angry." Before he had time to say more, Charlie's voice was heard in the hall, crying out, "Where's papa?"

"What do you want?" asked the rector, appearing in the passage.

"Here's a go," shouted Master Charlie—"the Browns are off—no one left in the house but Hans, and he looked as fierce as an old white rat, I can tell you, when I went and asked for Dodge."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Greateorex, "it's no business of ours what the Browns do, or where they go—for my part I would rather not know." The rector spoke so distinctly that the whole household now gathering together for prayers heard every word he said.

"They got warning, you may depend on it," said Mrs. Greateorex, after the servants had left the room, and her eyes glanced suspiciously at Mrs. Lescrimière.

Carry went up to her mother and said,—*"Mamma, I told Mrs. Brown, and not grandmamma."*

"You, child—when?"

Mr. Greateorex came to the assistance of the abashed little heroine. After hearing the explanation, Mrs. Greateorex said, rather severely, "Whenever you wish to conceal from your parents what you are going to do, you may be sure you are wrong. I trust you will never play such a trick again—it's very well nothing happened to you." Her mother's manner made Carry wince, made her feel as if she had been absurd instead of heroic.

"I believe I must share in Carry's blame," said Mrs. Lescrimière. "I dare say a story I told the children last evening put it into her head to go to the Hatch."

Mrs. Greatorrex did not say to her mother what she did afterwards to her husband—that she had been sure that her mother in one way or other had been the instigator of Carry's adventure.

"Unconsciously, perhaps, unconsciously, my dear," said the rector; "your mother is not one to put on another person's shoulders what she thinks ought to be done, and could herself do."

Mrs. Greatorrex began to dislike Mrs. Brown. Mother, husband, and child all taking her part—no one sympathizing in her view of the question—no, not even her intended son-in-law. Even he had been more inclined to pity than censure Mrs. Brown for her misfortunes. Women, such as Mrs. Greatorrex, who have all their lives walked in a straight open path, protected from all ambiguity by favouring circumstances, are apt to take fright at, to be suspicious even of any one of their own sex whose position is not so transparent as their own. They could pity, often befriend one who had been openly criminal; but to act as the English law commands—give credit for innocence till guilt be proved, is actually beyond their power; they shrink even from giving the benefit of a doubt. Mrs. Greatorrex had, in calling at the Hatch, yielded to the influence of her mother and husband; but, after the first enthusiasm created by Mrs. Brown's beauty and George's music had exhausted itself, Mrs. Greatorrex returned to her first belief in the unadvisability of intimacy with Mrs. Brown.

Maud's heart swelled with new-born joy when she was told that Mrs. Brown had left Eden; she had struggled bravely against jealousy, but she had

scotched, not killed, the green-eyed monster, "Love's curse." She had the self-control not to join in any of the depreciatory remarks her mother made to Escott; she could go no further than silence. She could not join in her grandmother's defence of Mrs. Brown, or respond to any appeal made in her behalf. The girl, so lately a type of happy tranquillity, had become a centre of agitation—her faculties sharpened to a morbid extent. No alchemist seeking for the philosopher's stone ever strove to penetrate into Nature's mysteries more perseveringly than did this young creature into the heart of her promised husband. Not a fall of his eyelids, not a compression of his lips, not a syllable he uttered, not a gesture passed unheeded—not one but from which she drew some conclusion which cut her to the quick. She was not aware that to her own pre-occupied manner was greatly due Escott's continued estrangement—an estrangement they both did their utmost to conceal from those around them; and so well did they succeed that her mother often said to Maud, "Enjoy the present, dear; they are the golden days of your life."

Maud could have cried aloud, so deep was the pang given by these words, so in contradiction to her feelings. She had not the resource of a passionate outbreak, which would have helped most women out of this sort of armed neutrality. Her own violent sensations were so new to her, that she was afraid of them; and then the look of weary resignation which would come into Escott's face, if she began any allusion to his change of manner, always acted as a spell

on her words. In fact, Escott dreaded explanations ; it was his theory that the only purpose they answer is to throw down the dyke which has restrained the floods of passion.

Maud at last submitted to his silent award that they should never talk of themselves.

“There is no remedy for it but patience. Old Æschylus himself gave no other counsel by the lips of his Chorus to Prometheus on the rock. Squeeze all those beautiful verses, and reduce them to their simple meaning, and you will have as the result, ‘Be patient.’ Patience and courage—there is no difficulty out of which one does not find an issue with those two aids.”

Something to this effect Maud one day heard her grandmother saying. The words were not addressed to her, but Maud felt them as so singularly *apropos* an answer to her own perplexity how to act with Escott, that she received them as an oracular message. Simple loving beings are inclined to be fatalists in moments of doubt, looking for good or bad omens in all around them, even in thistle-down. “He loves me a little—a great deal,” whispers the country girl, as she blows the light seed, and is comforted when the last puff mates with—passionately.

That gooding-day will be long remembered in Eden ; there had not been such a stirring day among its inhabitants since that on which the present rector brought home his beautiful “furrin” lady. First, there was the agitation consequent on the discovery that Mrs. Brown and George had left the Hatch during the night—run away in fact. Secondly, there was the arrival of the police officer from Z——, with

the summons for Mrs. Brown, a sufficient explanation of her flight: for, note well, every one in the village instantaneously believed the worst of Mrs. Brown—were even wroth when any of the rectory servants, better informed, declared she was sought as a witness, not as a criminal. People did not go off in the night, did they, unless they had something to be afraid of for themselves?

The general excitement reached its height when, later in the day, it was found out that Hans had also disappeared. This last event became known when one of the baker's sons brought a brown paper parcel, containing the keys of the Hatch, to the rector. "The old German," said the boy, "had given him a penny to carry the parcel to the rectory. Inside were a few lines in crabbed German, which Mademoiselle was called from the school-room to decipher, and which was to the effect that the half-year's rent for the Hatch had been paid in advance.

Mr. Greatorex went at once to the Hatch, accompanied by Escott and his churchwarden, Stephen Amos, and affixed his seal to the different boxes, into which Hans had packed several movables belonging to his mistress, and also on the wardrobes and drawers, which were still full of wearing apparel.

Next morning all Eden was palpitating anew, and this time it was with a ghost-story. Young Earl protested that when he was returning home about eleven o'clock the night before, as he reached the bit of road between Mr. Escott's lodgings and the Hatch, just where two ash-trees in opposite hedges bent over and joined their branches, something fluttered past

him; that it sounded like large wings, that he called out, and that though the moon was up and he could see fifty yards before and behind him, he was ready to take his Bible oath; not a creature, man or beast, was visible; that when he got near the Hatch he saw a light in the front of the house—he was sure it was outside, not inside, for it was moving in mid-air—he protested that no living thing could have carried it, it spread and spread—he must have watched it for five minutes; all on a sudden it vanished, and he thought he heard the same fluttering sound, but it was far off.

All the elder women in Eden knew what it was young Earl had witnessed—it was a “shell light,” and it predicted a death. The consternation was general; that of the lad who had had the visitation greatest of all. One dame remembered that Mrs. Stephen Hoghen, when nursing her daughter, having occasion to leave the sick-room one night, had been surprised at seeing a light which spread before her, and then passed away she did not know how or where, and very soon afterwards her daughter died. Another old lady related how her nephew, when only eight years old, as he was coming home with his father, who had been taken suddenly ill in the field, and was laid on a mattress in a cart, had been astonished at beholding a pale light all over his father, which lasted till they got to their own door, then passed away across the house, and the poor man died that same night. The boy had spoken of the light, wondering what it could be, but she had not told him it was a “shell-light” till he was grown up.

Young Earl’s story put the climax to the agitation

that had reigned since Mrs. Brown's disappearance. Not an invalid in the parish but felt worse that day, and Mrs. Greatorex was running from one to the other with the cordials of her own cheerfulness and bottles of wine. There was the old pair, Joe Noble and his wife, the former over ninety, the other in her eighty-ninth year; they certainly would not have survived the shock of the appearance of the "shell light" had Mrs. Greatorex not bolstered them up by the promise of plum-pudding on Christmas-day, and a bottle of old port. It was touching to hear the old husband say; "I hope it will please God to take me first; I dunna what I should do without her."

The young people of the rectory had been also out all day on errands of kindness. As they were returning home between three and four o'clock, they met Escott. He walked by Maud's side, taking from her a bundle of ivy and holly she was carrying.

"You look very much fatigued," he said.

"Maud's always tired now," said Charlie; "she ain't half such a girl as she was."

They were passing the castle hill at that moment.

"What's that, Walter?" whispered Carry, in a tone of fear.

"What's what?" he asked.

"Something moving among the trees," she said.

"A sheep, or a cow, I suppose," he answered. "I thought you had a brave spirit, Carry; did I not hear something of a little girl going out all by herself at night?"

Carry did not say anything more, but he felt that she was holding by his coat. Escott took leave of

Maud at the rectory gate, saying, "I have promised Stephen to help him this evening to hang the garlands in the church; so don't be astonished if you see me again at tea-time."

He spoke cheerfully with one of his bright, beautiful smiles, and he could see that Maud walked up the carriage-drive with a very different step from the languid dragging one which he had noticed when he overtook her.

No words, perhaps, could have so touched Escott as the sight of the effect produced by his own manner. That man must have indeed a hard nature who resists the evidence of the happiness he can impart. Certainly Escott could not, but Maud had not divined that the smile which so cheered her was a forced one—that it was assumed to hide one of those sudden qualms which come over us, as in the sunniest hour a passing cloud warns us that the sun will not always shine.

Some resemblance, fancied or not, with poor Charity Wood, over whom he had not long ago read the service for the dead, had made Escott feel as if stabbed to the heart. Maud's eye had surely the same wistful inquiring expression, her mouth the same droop, her lips the same dark purple line, betraying inward fever. In such moments of panic we realize what the world would be to us without that creature whom we may have been distrusting or undervaluing, or on whom we have, maybe, been emptying the vials of our pent-up irritation; in plain words, bullying. A great deal of bullying may be carried on under the shelter of quiet manners, and the show of politeness

By degrees, half-summoned, half-intruding themselves, came recollections of Maud's girlish goodness, her girlish dependence on his judgment, her girlish fondness, betrayed most when most attempted to be concealed. His pride said no to the inner voice of accusation—but his heart cried yes. "I believe I have been a selfish brute," he at last exclaimed—he had a comfort in calling himself by a hard name. He half turned to go back to the rectory, and, taking Maud to his heart, tell her he considered himself a prig and a goose for having tried to hide from her how precious she was to him.

But that shyness of demonstration so innate to his character stopped him, and he walked on thinking, "I will take the first opportunity of clearing away the cloud from between us."

How strange that we are more often ashamed of our good than of our bad impulses.

Escott had by this time reached the Hatch palings, when, something to his surprise, he heard the voice of Stephen Amos (the rector's churchwarden) raised in expostulation—raised, that is, as much as Stephen's great tenderness for his lungs, which he persisted, in the teeth of facts to the contrary, in believing to be in a very precarious state. The curate turned in at the gate, and saw Amos with bent back talking in at the front door key-hole, and in his hands, crossed behind him, several iron tools. Leaning against the wall by his side was the old gun with which the churchwarden went rabbit-shooting. A little to the right, half hid by some laurels, was the rural policeman.

CHAPTER XXII.

LE REVENANT.

“WHY, Stephen, what’s the matter?” asked Escott.

“God bless me, sir,” said Amos, straightening his back with the caution befitting a man rendered careful by lumbago; “I beg your pardon, Mr. Escott, but you startled me, sir.”

“I may return the compliment, Stephen,” said the curate. “Well, what’s wrong?”

“Why you see, sir,” Stephen began in his usual hoarse, familiar whisper, “why, you see, sir, all of a heap at dinner, it came into my head like a flash of lightning, sir, that them boy’s stories about lights and what not, why, sir, that it might be—thieves;” the last word hissed into Escott’s ear. “So says I to my missus, says I, I ain’t a-going to see that poor persecuted lady robbed afore my eyes, no I ain’t; and, says she—‘You ain’t a-going on no account without policeman; I can’t allow it,’ says she—‘la,’ says she, ‘you may come on a whole gang, you may.’ Well, sir, policeman warn’t at home just then, no more was Mr. Greatorex, and it don’t answer allays to be goin’ agen advice, though it be your wife as gev’ it”—here a sly chuckle—“so I hed to bide a bit. We brought the keys, but dang it, all the bolts inside is drawn, and the pantry winder’s fastened as never was afore, becuse ye see, sir, it was so small—now, sir, that couldn’t be done by ghosts, could it, sir?” and Amos waited for an answer

"Probabilities are against it," said Escott.

"I've bawled in that I'll fire through the key-hole and burst the door—but not a bit a' use—now, sir, I'm glad you're come to tell us what's best to be done."

"The policeman had better go and watch the back of the house, while you take out a pane of glass: if we cannot then open the shutter, you can cut through it."

"Very well, sir, I did think of that, but it was a responsibility to take on one's own shoulders," said Amos, as with alacrity he set about obeying Escott's directions.

When the curate had first given these orders, he had readily accepted Amos's notion of thieves; but while waiting till the old carpenter had removed the glass, another idea struck him. Perhaps Hans had returned during the night, wishing quietly to remove some of the articles left behind. He communicated this conjecture to Amos; but Amos slowly shook his head. "He ain't the man to do it, sir, and lard! he couldn't a pushed hisself through the pantry winder," and Amos, having removed a pane of one of the dining-room windows, undid the sneck, and, throwing up the sash, easily cut a hole through the shutter, which enabled him to push up the cross-bar with which it was secured.

Escott stepped in at the window, followed by Amos, the policeman still remaining on guard outside. "Take care what you are about with that noble gun of yours," said Escott, perceiving that the churchwarden had not neglected to be prepared for

the worst. "Don't be in a hurry to use it—put it at half-cock."

There was nothing to be seen in the dining-room, the drawing-room door was fastened within. "There, sir, you see there's something wrong," said Amos.

"No doubt," replied the curate—he rapped with his knuckles, saying, "Whoever is inside had better not give us the trouble of forcing an entrance—the policeman is outside and we have fire-arms; therefore, if you are in your senses, open the door"—no answer:—"Very well, I shall count three aloud," went on Escott, "and if the door is not opened, take the consequences. One—two—now when I pronounce the last number it will be instantly followed by our firing through the key-hole. The person left in charge is determined to protect the property in this house—you are fairly warned—I am going to say——"

The door slowly opened. "George Brown! Master George!" burst simultaneously from Escott and the churchwarden; though the drawing-room shutters were closed and the light from the hall was faint, still there was no mistaking the small short figure, even wrapped as it was in a cloak.

Amos first recovered his surprise. "Lor' bless us, Master George, whatever in the wide *wurruld* be you a-doing here?"

"That's my business," answered George. "Now you have satisfied your curiosity, perhaps you will be good enough to allow me the use of my mother's house?"

"My dear boy," said Escott, good-humouredly,

“what is the reason of your forcing us to play at hide-and-seek?”

George was in that state of mind when anything approaching to a joke sounds like an insult. “Upon my word, Mr. Escott,” he answered, “I think that question would come best from me. I had as little idea as wish that you should play at that game.” Escott was accustomed to hear vibrations of anger in George’s tones, but what he plainly detected now in them was the quivering of fear; the voice itself was hoarse and unequal.

“Some new misfortune has happened to these poor creatures,” said Escott to himself; he was still under the influence of his softened feelings—then aloud—“Amos, you had better tell the policeman his services are not further required.”

Amos lifted his hat and rubbed behind his ear, a sign of embarrassment with him; sidling up to the curate, he asked in a whisper, “Shall I tell him the truth, sir?”

An awkward query.

“Not just now—give him my message, and bid him call on me in an hour, and Amos, I fancy Master George might prefer speaking to me alone. You can wait for us, however, and, by-the-by, make the house safe again.”

Turning to George, whose egress from the drawing-room he had purposely barred by standing in the doorway, Escott said, “Now, you must take me into your confidence, for you cannot remain here alone—allow me to shut the door and open the shutters.”

Even while speaking, the curate had gently com-

pelled George to go farther into the centre of the room, and had opened the shutters. George seated himself on the sofa with his back to the window. Escott stood near him, leaning on the mantelpiece, trying to read George's face in the waning light. "Your mother?" began the curate, "is she with you?"

"Thanks; my mother was safely at Ostend the night before last."

"And you, what are you doing here?"

George hesitated, then replied abruptly, "I am not at liberty to tell you."

"You may be sure I will not force myself on your confidence, but cannot I be of some service; there will be no possibility of concealing your being here; the least danger of what you think right to keep secret being discovered, will be for you to come to my lodgings. I can give you a room."

"You are very good, but your home would not suit me." George made a very good attempt to resume his former jaunty manner, still it was clear enough that it was assumed.

"Surely, I can be of some use to you—help you."

"Past helping," said George; the words were almost lost in a desperate struggle with a rising sob.

"I see there's something very wrong with you," said the curate; "come, now, try to believe me an elder brother—forget our former little misunderstandings. Why, you know we had grown to be very good friends; let us shake hands like honest comrades. You'll find, if you trust me, that I am no

mere fair-weather acquaintance." Escott held out his hand.

"I can't take it," said George. "You can't be my friend; you wouldn't be if you knew the truth."

Escott was perplexed; such a phrase will set the most indulgent imagination speculating on possible delinquencies. Then his eye travelling over the childish figure of the self-accuser, the curate thought, "What error can this mere boy have committed?"—probably after all he would have merely to listen to a confidence of *hobadi-boyhood* love.

"Mr. Escott," said George, suddenly, "will you do me one favour?"

"Certainly."

"Leave me—go away; I can manage perfectly for myself, I assure you."

Escott had not been prepared for the request; he was a little hurt, and said, "Well, I won't refuse you what you so kindly call a favour; but first tell me, have you money for present exigences?"

"Yes, yes; don't tell *any* one I am here. I hate fuss."

"I am not prepared to make you a promise of concealment, even were secrecy possible, which it is not, considering that Amos knows of your being here, and that the policeman will also expect an explanation as to who had made a forcible entrance into the house. Besides, the more I reflect on the matter, the less I feel inclined to trust you to your own guidance. I feel responsible to your mother for your safe keeping. I suspect," and Escott fixed his eye firmly on George, "I suspect that she knows

nothing of your return here; in fact," laying his hand heavily on George's shoulder, "you have run away from her?" Escott felt the boy tremble, but in an instant he shrunk from under the curate's hold.

"By what right do you interfere with me?" asked George, in a fierce, shrill voice. "You know that my mother never liked you to have anything to do with me."

"That's true; and as you have reminded me of that, I will not pursue my first plan of insisting on your going home with me; but whether it pleases you or not, I shall see you safely under Mr. Greator's protection before we part company."

"Don't, don't persecute me, Mr. Escott." The phrase irritated Escott—it sounded so extravagant and absurd.

"Persecute! nonsense—be reasonable, and come with me quietly. No one, I promise you, will ask you any questions as to how or why you came hither; and my advice to you is to set off to-morrow and rejoin your mother."

"Ask Amos to let me go to his house," said George, "and I will go away to-morrow."

"You are wrong," returned Escott; "why avoid your equals?"

"Oh! Mr. Escott, do not urge me so hard; let me go my own way—it will be better for everybody."

"I shall not give you further advice, but I shall keep an eye on you;" and Escott, calling in Amos, mentioned George's wish.

"Well, sir, I'm sure I'm agreeable; but Master

George would be a deal more comfortable with you, or at the rectory, than with us ; the schoolmistress, she have our biggest room, and we've only a closet besides, without a fire-place ; but if it'll do, why, sir, there it is."

"It will do," said George, in a low voice.

Escott, touched by George's dejected tone and look, and moved also by some of that regret with which we look for the last time even on those in whom we take but a trivial interest, said, "I shall be at the rectory in the evening, and should you change your mind and wish to see me, send a message, and I will come to you." As Escott paused, George said, "Thank you." The curate went on, "Then I shall not say good-by, but only good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, sir."

Escott, thinking he descried signs of yielding in the boy, and that it might be the best way of managing him, to leave him to the working of the feelings natural to his age, said, *au revoir*, and left the room. He was scarcely in the hall before George called after him hurriedly, "Mr. Escott." Escott stopped directly, "Well, what is it?" he said, with what he meant to be an encouraging smile, but it produced the contrary effect, for George added, "No, I needn't trouble you. Good afternoon."

"Remember, I shall expect to see you again before you leave to-morrow," said Escott.

George nodded.

Escott walked slowly away, expecting to be again recalled. "We shall have the confession before bed-

time," he thought, more curious than he would have owned to discover the reasons that had brought George back to Eden.

Amos, who had been standing by, remained a minute or two patient, but seeing George continue in the same position, as if utterly forgetful that there was any one waiting his pleasure, the carpenter said, "Now, Master George, it be a'most tea-time, and the missus be terrible punctual. Why, Lor a mercy, whatever ails the lad?" The moment Amos spoke, George burst into a passion of tears. "Dearie me, dearie me, and there's Mr. Escott fairly gone. Come now, sir, boys never oughtn't to cry like that. I'll lay anything, now, you're a bit hungry. You'll feel no end better for a cup of tea. Come now, sir." George made no answer, but lifting his cap from a table close by, walked quickly out of the door, Amos following. The good-natured man tried hard to find amusing conversation for his self-invited guest—but not a syllable could he win from George.



CHAPTER XXIII.

NEW LIGHTS.

THE excitement Escott's tale produced at the rectory was, to speak within the bounds of truth, immense. The effect was to make the elders of the family change characters.

Mrs. Lescrianière was struck dumb by surprise, while Mrs. Greatorex became unusually talkative,

and declared herself unable to believe her own ears. "You actually saw him, spoke to him?" she asked over and over again.

Mild Mr. Greatorex said, "I have a great mind to send for the policeman and have the young monkey brought here, whether he likes it or not. A bad boy, to be adding to his poor mother's troubles at this moment."

"But what can have brought him back, and how did he come, and how has he got anything to eat?" went on Mrs. Greatorex. "Walter, what a pity you hadn't thought of asking him if he had had any food; it's enough to make him ill if he has been fasting ever since last night, for I suppose he will turn out to be the ghost of the Hatch.

"They were all still in the thick of conjectures when James the footman came into the room, and in the voice peculiar to the bearer of important news, informed Mrs. Greatorex that Mrs. Amos would be glad to say a few words to her.

"Beg Mrs. Amos to go into the library;" and away hurried Mrs. Greatorex, saying, as she went, "Now we shall get at the truth about Master Dodge."

"Well, Mrs. Amos," began the rector's lady, "I fancy you have had as great a start as the rest of us."

Mrs. Amos was a tall, square, spare woman, nicely dressed in black, as became the station of a churchwarden's wife; her bonnet indeed was in the *height* of the fashion. Her manner at all times was prim, such as you often find in women who have had no children to make them forget themselves. Mrs. Amos

became doubly starched when nervous, and was so slow in delivering herself of what she had come to say, that she nearly made her present curious listener wring her hands with impatience.

"Yes'm—of course it came on me quite sudden like, and, as you knows, Mrs. Greatorex, it don't answer very well for me to get them starts. I don't get over it so easy as other folks—it's my constitution; my mother and me and all my family were the same—we couldn't stand being started," and here Mrs. Amos came to a full stop.

"I wish Mr. Escott could have persuaded Master George to come to us," said Mrs. Greatorex, adding with resignation, "but sit down, Mrs. Amos; I hope you have nothing worse to tell me of, than a boyish freak."

Mrs. Amos took from her pocket a large linen pocket-handkerchief, and, contemplating its hem, said very gutturally, "I ain't used to be taken so quick; and, to speak my mind, Mrs. Greatorex, I don't think Amos, knowing me as he does, ought to have done it; but women ain't prophets to find out all they'll have to bear when they marry; and a man somehow always do manage to worrit one's feelings."

"Come, Mrs. Amos, I am sure you have no good reason to complain of your husband. Every one knows what a respect he has for your opinion, but now tell me if I can help you with your visitor?"

"That's what I am coming to, Mrs. Greatorex; there's more wrong about this young gentleman coming here than we guesses at—he won't come into the parlour, nor swaller even a cup of tea; and when

we listens at the door, we hears a noise as if he were crying with his head under the bed-clothes—it's a providence, 'm, there ain't nothing more nor a latch to the closet, so he can't lock himself in, or he'd do it; and now, 'm, if you or the rector would step up and see what's to be done—it's a fine night sure, or I wouldn't beg it of you."

"I'll ask Mr. Greateorex what he thinks best," said the lady.

When the rector had heard Mrs. Amos's account, he said, "I'll go myself and bring the young man here. I have no idea of our all yielding to his vagaries;" and the rector put on his clerical hat, which he always did when he went to remonstrate with offenders. Mr. Greateorex had a quiet way of carrying his point when he thought it worth while, so no one doubted but that George would return with him. In half-an-hour steps were heard in the hall, and a minute afterwards, Mr. Greateorex put in his head at the drawing-room door and said, "Grandmamma, you are wanted." When Mrs. Lescrimière obeyed the summons, the rector whispered, "He is in the dining-room, strike while the iron's hot. I have had a sore struggle to bring him here; he has promised to tell you what's the matter with him."

Mrs. Lescrimière first shut the dining-room door, then said in her most cordial voice, "Why, Dodge, my dear boy, what makes you wish to keep out of our way? Whatever is wrong will be easier put to rights with the help of friends than without;" she was now close to him.

For one instant he stood motionless, then suddenly

throwing his arms round her neck, he clung to her with the convulsive grasp of terror, saying, in a broken whisper, "Save me, save me."

"Child, child, what have you done? tell me; we will protect you, but tell me truly what it is?"

Mrs. Lescririère was obliged to use all her strength to support him, and then through chattering teeth, she heard his avowal.

"Hush, hush—don't shake so—it's no crime," said Mrs. Lescririère, in a low voice. George had fainted.

"Here's a pretty business," muttered the old lady to herself as she laid the senseless form on the floor, and ran to fetch her daughter. Within an hour every one in the rectory knew, even to the smallest child, that George Brown had turned out to be a young lady instead of a young gentleman.

Mrs. Greatorex bore the shock of the discovery wonderfully well. We constantly see persons who are easily disturbed by petty annoyances, bear great ones with praiseworthy equanimity. This was pretty much the case with Mrs. Greatorex: she felt herself now fairly caught in the net of misery and mischance entangling the Browns, and showed a placidity that none of the rest of her family could equal.

Mr. Greatorex was more perturbed than he had ever been since his marriage; Maud half frightened; Escott in a boiling indignation; he paced up and down the room, repeating again and again,—"It's unpardonable, the case must be indeed a desperate one which could excuse such a deception on us all."

At last Maud took courage and said,—"We must

remember that Mrs. Brown did all she could to avoid us—we intruded on her.”

“Maud,” exclaimed Escott, “you are too good yourself to understand how thoroughly wrong the conduct of these people has been;” he added more to himself than her, “it is despairing to think how evil runs so closely alongside of our best efforts to do good.”

Mr. Greatorex, who had not heard what Escott was saying, observed that he was very sorry that he had spoken so harshly that evening to the poor young thing,—“but how,” added he, looking at his irate curate,—“how was I ever to imagine I was talking to a girl?”

“How indeed!” repeated Escott; and continued his quick step.

“It’s quite true what Maud said—we have only ourselves to blame; we must just accept the consequences,” said the rector.

An answer rose to Escott’s lips, but he caught sight of Maud’s anxious face, and repressed it.

Mrs. Greatorex presently came in to say, that she thought they had better send for Mr. Hunt—the poor girl’s head was wandering.” Mr. Greatorex agreed, and left the room to give the necessary orders, for Mr. Hunt, the surgeon of the Union, lived three miles off.

“There must have been a motive for his coming back here—I mean *her*,” said Escott, correcting himself. “I shall never be able to think of her but as George Brown. Do you know why she returned?”

Mrs. Greatorex hesitated, and turned away from

Escott's inquiring look, saying,—“ We shall find out by-and-by. I suppose I had better go and see what's doing upstairs,” and left Maud and Escott to a *tête-à-tête*.

Escott had not addressed himself more than once to Maud, yet she knew perfectly well that they were friends again—nay, she was conscious of having gained a new power. She said to him with new-born frankness,—“ You are too hard on the Browns.”

“ Am I ? ” he answered. “ Well, if I am, forgive me for that and for many other hardnesses, will you ? ”

“ Forgive *you* ? Walter, you were quite right, and I was quite wrong.”

He smiled : the smile was not free of sadness, and said,—“ Long may you look at me through the glasses you now wear, dear Maud—” and then their talk became only interesting to themselves.

Escott did not leave the rectory till after the arrival of the medical man. Mr. Hunt depressed the ladies' spirits to his heart's satisfaction, by allowing that he perceived incipient symptoms of brain fever, and then managed by dexterous questions to elicit much more of the Browns' story than Mrs. Greatorex wished to impart. Having prescribed, the surgeon rode off with an exhilarating dose of gossip for his next day's patients.

Every one knows how rapidly news spreads—particularly sinister news. In a few minutes after the Duc de Berri was assassinated, the fact was known at the other end of Paris ; and oh ! after Mr. Hunt's visit, what a tide of talk flowed through the parish ! what a confusion of persons, and ideas and names !

It was astonishing, if the speakers were to be believed, how many there were who had suspected the truth, "only it was not their way to trouble their heads about their neighbours' affairs;" it sounded, however, vastly like prophesying after the fact.

Mrs. Greatorex indeed, and she might be relied on, said she had had her suspicions excited by what Mr. Twyford had told her husband; her doubts, however, were not forty-eight hours old.

Never had Escott felt more uncomfortable than when he left the rectory that night. He walked as men walk who carry an overburden—he was indeed weighted by a thought which he resisted as one resists a bitter enemy—a thought born of Mrs. Greatorex's strange reticences when he pushed her on the subject of the return of the disguised girl to Eden, spurred by some recollections of his own. "This all comes," quoth he, "of leaving the safe and beaten paths traced by experience."



CHAPTER XXIV.

"SCATTERED FOAM, THAT'S HER HISTORY."

IF any one had prophesied three days before to Mrs. Greatorex, that she would eagerly welcome Mrs. Brown (so late the object of her suspicions) as a guest at the rectory on Christmas Day, and that she would not close her eyes the night before from anxiety about George, Mrs. Greatorex would have set down such a prophet as a false one. Yet so it was.

Early on Christmas morning a fly stopped at the rectory gate, and out of it stepped Mrs. Brown, pale and fatigued, with that peculiar look of distress in her face, of disorder in her dress, which arises from a pressure of mental anxiety joined to a night passed in travelling.

A very few lines will suffice to explain how Mrs. Brown and George had left Eden, and how it happened that the latter had been able to return thither. Long before dawn they had set off for the station, distant three miles, carrying a small bag containing a few necessary articles; they had luckily met no one who could recognize them, and had been in time for one of the down trains to Dover. The Ostend steamer was to leave at four in the afternoon. Mrs. Brown got her passport *viséd* and then remained, she and the disguised George, in a quiet out-of-the-way hotel till it was time to embark. Immediately on going on board, Mrs. Brown went down to the ladies’ cabin, and it was then that George managed to slip back on shore; and Mrs. Brown was half way across, before she had the slightest suspicion of what had occurred—not indeed, till paying the steward for the two tickets, she had begged him to see after a short young gentleman with fair, curly hair, and to let her know how he was. The steward had returned in a few minutes to say, that he could find no young gentleman answering to that description. The poor lady was half-distracted; she scarcely so much feared an accident, as that George had gone back to Eden; she had sufficient grounds for this conjecture. There

was only one thing for her to do—at all risks she must return by the next boat—but the passage was longer than usual, and when she reached Ostend, the steamer for England was already out of harbour. By this unlucky delay of a day she had missed finding Hans still at the Hatch; he had left the evening before, as pre-arranged, to join her at Ostend. Finding the Hatch locked up, and too evidently empty, Mrs. Brown had then driven to John Earl's, hoping that George might have taken refuge there. Kind Miss Earl had enlightened the poor mother as to her child's safety, of her being at the rectory, and of the discovery that had ensued.

Mrs. Greatorrex actually kissed Mrs. Brown in the passage before all the maids; a greeting which went far to satisfy their minds that Mrs. Brown might be unfortunate, but could not have been guilty of any misdemeanor. "You must have a cup of tea before you see ——" Mrs. Greatorrex paused—from habit she was going to say your son, but remembered in time that the son had become a daughter.

"George, you would say," Mrs. Brown said. Her name is Georgiana, but she has almost always gone by the name of George—it was begun in joke from her being such a romp;" the poor mother sighed.

"And I don't think we could ever learn a new name," said Mrs. Greatorrex. "I am glad to give you a good report; she is doing as well as possible, only we must avoid agitation, for she was a little light-headed during the night."

"I will do as you advise," replied Mrs. Brown, and then Mrs. Greatorrex began to understand that

the poor woman’s apparent calmness was the passiveness of extreme exhaustion.

“I must take you in hand as a patient also,” said the rector’s wife ; “you must be sent to bed, after you have had some breakfast. In the meanwhile we will break the news of your arrival to Georgey.”

“Yes, I think that will be best,” returned Mrs. Brown, too worn out for resistance.

Mrs. Lescrimière prepared Georgey as carefully as possible for seeing her mother. When Mrs. Brown appeared at the bed-side and stooped to kiss the poor little face eagerly turned to her, George exclaimed, “Oh ! mother, forgive me ; I have done wrong, but no harm has come to me.” Mrs. Brown’s very lips turned blue, but she shed no tear, uttered no word.

“Mother, mother, don’t look so,” cried George, sitting bolt upright in the bed ; “the wickedness is gone out of me.”

Mrs. Lescrimière here interfered and said that she could allow of no exciting conversations ; by-and-by there would be plenty of time for explanations. Mrs. Brown sat by the sleeping girl—there was no light in the room, save that from the fire ; shadows quivered over the walls, the ceiling, the floor. Some one—was it not David Scott?—painted a picture, representing a widow seated at the tomb of her husband, from out of which rose the ladder of memory, and on every rung or round the vision of some scene of the widow’s past life. There was the first meeting, the betrothal, the marriage, the first-born, and so on until the last parting, lost in the pitying heavens.

Mrs. Brown, as she kept lonely watch by her unhappy child's bed, was gazing at some similar phantoms. The past thrust itself forward on her (as it does on us all one day or other); she saw plainly the first mistake which had coloured her life, without which she would not have had the trials that now afflicted her; she saw (as we are all one day or other forced to do) how the false step might have been avoided, that she had erred (as we all do) through her own wilfulness, that the door of escape had been open, and then—she shrunk from further self-communing—for deep, deep, in the secret places of her soul was a doubt, a doubt full of remorse, whether she entirely repented of, and regretted that which had been.

For she *had been* so happy! A gleam from the golden past shone over her even now. She breathed again the perfumed air of the beautiful glen in which she had first met the man she had so truly, so constantly loved; she heard again his voice, his very words, and her whole being thrilled, as though that tender whisper was even now spoken in her ear. She felt the very touch of his hand, and a vivid, long unknown sensation of happiness came over her. The sudden opening of a door below, and the sound of children's merry voices, brought her back to the dark present.

In a few minutes Mrs. Lescrimière put her head into the sick room, and perceiving that George was asleep, beckoned Mrs. Brown away, saying, "We'll send nurse to take your place. I have something to show you." She took Mrs. Brown into her own room.

“Sit down, my dear,” began Mrs. Lescrimière in a motherly tone; “and read this effusion, prudently addressed to me;” she handed a note to Mrs. Brown.

It was written in the schoolmistress’s best hand, and ran as follows:

“DEAR MADAM,—I think it a duty to let some one at the rectory know what has come to my ears. As it has no reference to the school, I do not feel at liberty to address the Rev. Mr. Greatorex—nor perhaps Mrs. Greatorex on the subject; that is my reason for troubling you, madam. I have been reproached as the cause of all the late trouble to some persons lately residing in this parish, I need not say who. So as a Christian, particularly at this holy season of the year, I shall try to return good for evil. It has been mentioned to me, on the best authority, that our policeman is going early to-morrow on business to Z——. A word to the wise is enough. Be so obliging as only to speak of this note to whom it concerns.—Your obedient servant,

“ALBINIA COX.”

“She means he is going for a summons for me,” exclaimed Mrs. Brown, starting to her feet. “Can they not leave me in peace even for one day?”

Mrs. Lescrimière could scarcely recognize the voice and look with which these words were uttered as those of the placid Mrs. Brown. It was in truth the cry of impatience extorted from one on the rack by the sting of a gnat. “Do not agitate yourself unnecessarily,” the old lady said soothingly; “if you

are determined, really determined not to appear as a witness . . .”

“Quite—quite,” interrupted Mrs. Brown; “I could not do it—no one would ask me who knew all—the whole world may blame him, I cannot—more, I will not.”

Mrs. Lescrimière was going to speak, when Mrs. Brown continued with a rapidity quite startling, “I know he did wrong.”

“Been cruel and selfish?” broke in Mrs. Lescrimière.

“No—not cruel to me—no, never, you don’t know, how can you, how happy I have been; sixteen years of happiness, is that to count for nothing, to merit no gratitude—what was I, till I knew him? I was not of his station——”

“Stop,” said Mrs. Lescrimière decidedly, “I beg your pardon, my dear, for being so abrupt, but you are talking nonsense; whether you were princess or peasant, this Mr. Bouverie (it’s no use keeping up the mystification), this Mr. Bouverie knew perfectly well he was ruining *your* life, that of another woman who had trusted him, and also breaking the laws of his country. I have no pity to spare for *him*. I only wish he had *me* to deal with. I would not shelter him.”

“But I have loved him,” said Mrs. Brown in her usually subdued tone, her hands over her face, “and I cannot injure him.”

“Well, I shall not dispute the point with you,” said Mrs. Lescrimière. “I have no right to dictate to you, nor to ask you to adopt my mode of thinking;

but were I in your place, I would prove my own innocence, prove that I had been sinned against, not sinning.”

“And what would that do for me? Would it cancel the past—restore my heart to what it was when I first knew him?—the world’s good opinion cannot do that for me—God Himself cannot annihilate that which has once been. He can pardon, and make our crimson sins white as snow—but the sins have been—they are as imperishable as our spirit.”

“Poor soul!” ejaculated Mrs. Lescrimière, gently forcing Mrs. Brown to sit down again, and holding her hand. “Poor soul! tell me what I can do to help you, and I will do it?”

“Dear kind lady!—get me out of England.”

“My son and daughter will, I am sure, let you have the carriage to take you to Dover—that will be better than the railway for you.”

“Thank you, thank you,” then suddenly she added, “but Georgey, she cannot be moved yet.”

“Have you no friends who would take charge of her for you—no one to apply to in this hour of trouble?”

Mrs. Brown shook her head sadly. “I was an orphan almost from my birth, and the relations who brought me up and who provide me with my present means of subsistence, have my promise that I will never inflict on them the scandal of our presence, or be the means of bringing their names associated with mine before the public—they are severe, unrelenting, but they prevent our having the additional trial of actual poverty to contend with. I need scarcely

say," added Mrs. Brown, a scarlet flush spreading itself over her face, "that since *he* confessed his real situation to me, all communication between us has ceased."

"I believe in you thoroughly," said Mrs. Lescrimière. "I will undertake the charge of Georgey, and when she is able to travel I will send her with my maid to meet you wherever you write to say you will wait for her."

"I never—no, never shall have any means of proving to you my undying gratitude," said Mrs. Brown—"but I am grateful." She sat silent a while, only a slight vibration of the head evidencing her inward emotion.

"Poor Georgey," she began. "I hope you will all forgive her; her disguise was not her own doing, it was advised as a means towards our escaping recognition. She was always of an excitable temperament, and I fear that her education fostered instead of correcting her faults—she was encouraged in boy's habits and amusements. Poor child! she was delighted at having a mysterious part to play—and overacted it."

"Georgey's faults are not those which prevent her being loved—we are all deeply interested in you both," said Mrs. Lescrimière.

Mrs. Brown looked into the kind woman's face and said, "Don't think me cold, if I beg now to go away and remain alone with George."

"You shall do as you like," said Mrs. Lescrimière, "but if you would take my advice you would leave George to nurse, and try to have a quiet night."

“I shall sleep best by her side, it will perhaps prevent bad dreams,” said Mrs. Brown.

When Mrs. Brown returned to the sick girl, Mrs. Lescrimière went to the drawing-room and told Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex of the warning that she had received as to the policeman’s movements, without betraying the source from whence derived, and also of her consequent promises in their name as to hospitality to George, and the loan of the carriage to take Mrs. Brown to Dover. “Oh! let her have the carriage certainly,” said Mrs. Greatorex with undissembled alacrity, “and of course Georgey can stay here till she is able to travel.”

“My dear ladies,” said Mr. Greatorex, “you are all alarming yourselves unnecessarily. I have been making inquiries as to the risks and perils of witnesses, and I find that even after a subpoena has been served on any one, the consequences are practically *nil*, unless the witness has already appeared before a magistrate and been bound over to appear on the trial. Mrs. Brown can stay here perfectly well until her daughter is fit to be moved. Believe me, a witness cannot be carried off by force like a criminal; our laws have an extreme tenderness for the liberty of the subject.”

“I do beg,” said Mrs. Greatorex, turning to her husband, “that you will not interfere with Mrs. Brown’s very natural wish to get away. I am sorry for her, still I must consider my own family. It is bad enough to have been already so mixed up in a most unpleasant story; the sooner we extricate ourselves from it, the better; besides, it could answer no good purpose to detain her.”

"Well, well, let her go," replied Mr. Greatorex. "I hope we shall not be hauled over the coals for spiriting away witnesses," he added, laughing: however, to do the thing handsomely I had better go with her and see her safely on board a steamer."

"You!!" exclaimed the rector's wife in a tone of horrified astonishment. "You! go with Mrs. Brown? why, just fancy how every one would talk."

"And if they talked themselves to death, my dear Louisa," said Mrs. Lescrimière, "what harm could that do your kind husband?"

"No, that is a thing I will *not* allow," continued Mrs. Greatorex, without replying to her mother. "We have done quite enough; I am sure Mrs. Brown herself would object to such a proposal, or she is not as grateful as she professes to be. Oh, mother! how imprudent you are! when you know as well as I do, how ready every one is to throw stones at the church and the clergy. Just reflect, how it would look to see Mr. Greatorex travelling about the country *tête-à-tête* with such a beautiful woman as Mrs. Brown, to whom besides such a story is attached."

"How odd you should be my daughter!" ejaculated Mrs. Lescrimière.

"Oh! my dear mother, don't be too severe on me," exclaimed Mrs. Greatorex, warned by a spark in her mother's eye, and a certain rigidity in the lines of the mouth.

Mrs. Lescrimière took a long breath, and said,—
"My dear, I'll be merciful—besides I believe you are right. I'll go myself, and Greatorex, comfort your wife in private, by telling her that every one

knows my eccentricity, and no one doubts my respectability. Sleep well, my Louisa, you are a good daughter, good wife, good mother, don’t deny yourself occasionally one of the best rewards of an unspotted life, that of holding out a protecting hand to those who, from adverse circumstances, not guilt, mind you, may require a moral support, and so good-night, and God bless you both.”



CHAPTER XXV.

GONE.

MRS. LESCRIMIÈRE was as good as her word. She accompanied Mrs. Brown to Dover, and saw her safely on board the steamer for Ostend. Escott, who thought he understood, and certainly shared in Mrs. Brown’s wish that they should not meet, and had consequently kept away from the rectory since her arrival there, had by accident a sight of her as she and Mrs. Lescrimière drove out of Eden. The sharp way in which Mrs. Brown turned aside from his glance and bow confirmed the curate in his suspicions as to the cause of Georgey’s wild act. Yet the look of repugnance with which the beautiful sorrowful face turned from him made Escott wince.

“She is unjust!” he said to himself—“she is like a child who is wroth with the table against which it has struck its head. I was as innocent of all wish to harm her or hers as any stock or stone. I meant

well when, overcoming my repugnance, I strove to let in light on the darkened soul of her child. It is I who ought to resent the ridiculous situations in which I have been placed by such masquerading."

Escott smarted under his first experience of being misjudged, and by one on whom he had thought to have a claim for gratitude. He was keenly sensitive to blame, at the same time that he had in him the something of hardness which belongs to the young, strong, untried upright man, who has never yet been taught gentleness, by having felt himself on the verge of falling. Yes, when we meet one who has a tender, generous indulgence for others, we may make sure that "he has suffered—being tempted."

"He that works me good with unmov'd face, does it but half, he chills me while he aids, my benefactor—not my brother man." In the "mov'd face" lies the secret of the success of the charity, or the consolations we offer to one another.

Hitherto Escott had lived in a charmed circle of love and approbation, feeling no urgent need for sympathy—but as the bitter of olives improves the taste of the best wine, so did his present vexation make him sensible of the full sweetness of Maud's faith in him. Though all the world might misunderstand him, she would not. Once at this point he may be safely left to his *tête-à-tête* with nature.

Far away reaching to an indefinite horizon rolled the vast relentless sea; close by his side, the little clear spring, which had bubbled up from beneath a cool mossy stone, went rippling merrily along, doing its modest duty by the pastures and the milky

mothers. Sea and rivulet, fields and aromatic fir-woods, spoke to him in voices "sent by some spirit to mortals good," conjuring away all the clinging cobwebs spun by mortified feelings.

Now we must return to the rectory.

Whatever face Mrs. Greatorex might wear to the world; however genuinely kind to the sick girl, she was not the less in a fever of anxiety to be quit of her guest. All sorts of reports had got abroad respecting the Browns, in which the Greatorexes figured prominently. Letters asking for explanations, letters epigrammatic, letters of condolence, flowed in, backed by visits partaking of the different characters of the letters. Mrs. Greatorex had to defend herself both in writing and speaking. She was on *her* trial, it seemed. Mrs. Lonsdale was the flower of all her visitors. She came into the rectory drawing-room with a "Well, Mrs. Greatorex, a nice scrape you and I are in; every one is open-mouthed at our imprudence—it's fortunate, I say, that it's no worse—goodness, it might have been swindling, or murder, or infanticide, you know—every one wonders how you and I ever called on a person that nobody knew anything about. I always say, I should never have done it, had you not introduced her to me. I am sure never was anything more like one of those stupid stories in a novel than this, which we know to be actually true. It is bigamy, isn't it? I am dying to read the trial, it's to come on after the 11th, Mr. Lonsdale says. And the boy, oh! heavens, I mean the girl—how well Willie's name for her suited—Dodge—capital—the cap fitted there. What does she look like dressed as a girl—

I'd give anything to see her, do you think she would mind seeing me?"

"She is not able to bear any excitement," said Mrs. Greatorrex, very coldly.

"What on earth made her come back here? They say Mr. Escott was the one to discover where she was hidden—I suppose you know that it's against the law for a woman to dress herself in man's clothes?"

"A woman! she's a mere child," replied Mrs. Greatorrex, adding in a severe tone,—“By-the-by, Mrs. Lonsdale, what was your authority for telling Lady Marston that you were sure a curate not a hundred miles off hadn't been so blind as the rest of us?"

"Authority! my dear creature! besides, I didn't say I was sure, I said I wondered if he had been taken in. Somebody told me he was very intimate at the Hatch, walking about with the youth and teaching him. You can't stop people's tongues—as for me I have always protested *I* was not in the secret—that I took the Browns on trust, thinking I might, as I met them here. Lady Marston said it was well I had no young girls about me."

"Fiddle-faddle," exclaimed Mrs. Greatorrex, roused to show that she had inherited some of her mother's spirit; "as if Lady Marston had never rubbed against something not half so good as Mrs. Brown. I hate such hypocrisy."

"Well, for my part," said Mrs. Lonsdale, "I've no ill-will to Mrs. Brown—only it's imprudent to have anything to do with people under a cloud."

Here was Mrs. Greatorrex's own argument pre-

sented to her, and very unpalatable it tasted. Mrs. Lonsdale went on,—“ I shall come and congratulate you the day you get rid of the whole set. You can't imagine what jokes there are. Don't be afraid, I am not going to repeat them, only I warn you, Mr. Lonsdale says he heard a parcel of young men declare they should come and take up their quarters at Eden to get a sight of Miss George.”

Mrs. Greatorrex immediately sent for Mr. Hunt to ask if the young girl was not sufficiently convalescent to travel. Mr. Hunt was at a loss what to say on the subject; he acknowledged he could not account for such a prostration of strength—the amount of fever she had had did not, according to him, warrant her state of weakness. The two elder ladies could have enlightened him, but they contented themselves with hoping that Maud and Escott were as much in the dark as the doctor. It was a great deal of blindness to expect of Maud. Does not every woman who feels as Maud felt towards Escott, suspect every other single one of her sex, of seeing with *her* eyes, and feeling with *her* heart?

The rector's lady being a prudent person, never rested till she had brought Mr. Hunt to agree that the time was come when change of air would benefit the invalid; and accordingly Mrs. Lescrimière wrote to that effect to Mrs. Brown, Poste Restante, Ostend, adding that they would hasten Georgey's going, so that she might be out of England before the coming on of a certain case for trial.

It was a delicate task to prepare Georgey for her immediate departure; but Mrs. Lescrimière did so

with every maternal precaution. To save her the pains of anticipation, nothing was said till the morning of the day fixed for her leaving the rectory.

Georgey remained silent for awhile after she understood the intimation. Mrs. Lescrimière continued speaking to her caressingly, passing her fingers through the fair curls clustering so thickly over the poor girl's head. Georgey at last drew down the kind hand, and holding it tightly between her own, said in a thick, tremulous voice,—“I want to tell you something before I go; don't let any one come in here.”

Mrs. Lescrimière said, “I'll lock the door, and, my dear, I am willing to listen to you, but pause and ask yourself if you have a right to say what you are desirous of saying.”

“Yes, yes; it's about myself,” said Georgey, impatiently, and then lapsed again into silence, her rapid changes of colour showing a sharp inward struggle,—then she went on petulantly,—“I don't know where to begin, it's all such a confusion. I am not good, Mrs. Lescrimière, and that's why I am so unhappy, I suppose. I hated Mr. Escott because he looked with such holy horror on me whenever I met him. I did all I could to vex him. When I first went to church it was to make game of him—for we never used to go to church—there were only Catholics where we lived, and my father said that the only sensible way to worship God was by loving and admiring His works. I hated Mr. Escott too, because he thought ill of my mother, and only on account of her not going to church; he took care that every one in the village should know he thought ill of us. She read

her Bible as much as any one, and tried to make me do so. I felt she was better than he was, for when I told her what was said, she answered, that if she went against the habits of the persons she lived amongst, she must expect to be blamed. She had no objection to going to church, only perhaps by staying away, it might prevent our being visited, which was what she wished. Oh! Mrs. Lescrimière, I did not hate him any more when I saw him go away, all wet as he was, to old Betsey Curtis, and then Charity Wood——” Georgey hid her face in her hands.

“There, never mind telling me any more,” said Mrs. Lescrimière, “I understand; it was not very wonderful; poor little girl—poor little girl!”

“Mamma wanted to go away—weeks ago—and I would not let her. I did not wish for anything, except that he should know I cared for him. I did not want him to care for me, I was not so bad as that—I felt as if then I could go away happy. I could not bear his indifferent way of speaking to me, as if he tried to do me good just as he would Larry Earl, as a matter of duty, for his conscience’ sake. I wished to do right, and yet, I can’t tell how it was, I longed for something to happen that would let me do wrong.”

“Poor dear child! Poor dear child!” murmured Mrs. Lescrimière.

“Yes, yes,” went on Georgey, with a dry sob checking her words, “I used to hide among the trees on the Castle Hill, and see him coming here and—and—it was like as if some evil spirit got into me. I could have killed him sometimes, and in my heart I

wished evil to him and Miss Maud, and then I would cry and pray; yes, I did pray God to make him happy. I could not go away for ever without seeing him, I did not dare to go to his lodgings; I believe I was half mad when I ran away from the steamer; I walked all the way back and I didn't feel tired. I met Larry Earl, and I frightened him with lucifer matches to get rid of him, and then I went home. I knew the pantry window would not fasten, and I squeezed through it into the house. I did not sleep all night,"—here there came a breathless pause, then hastily,—“I longed to do something that would make him suffer.” . Georgey lay back panting on the sofa on which she was resting, “and now I have disgraced myself for ever, and I can't bear any one to look at me but you. Miss Maud is so good, so happy, I try not to mind, but it gives me pain to see her. Are you angry with me?” as Mrs. Lescrimière turned her head aside to wipe her eyes; “pray don't be, I am not worth being angry with, no more than a poor worm.”

“Angry! poor child,” and Mrs. Lescrimière put her arms round the small figure, smaller than ever now.

“Don't let him hate me, don't, oh! pray don't,” whispered Georgey; “tell him I will remember all he has said to me, I will go to church, I will try to be good, and then he will forgive me.”

“There's no question of forgiveness between him and you, Georgey; he is grieved at your imprudence, but he has never spoken of you save with kindness.”

“Thank you,” said Georgey, very softly; emotion had quite taken away her voice.

Mrs. Lescrimière perceived how well it was that Georgey was to leave Eden directly: with the caress of a tender mother she said cheerfully, "You will begin from to-day, from this moment, to act so as to give Mr. Escott the best of rewards for the interest he has shown in you—that of knowing you are brave in well-doing, forgetting yourself to comfort your mother."

Georgey's face lighted up at these words. "But how will he know?" she asked, with the persistence of a child.

Mrs. Lescrimière was one who believed that our human affections are given us to lead us to spiritual love; further she thought that, in moral maladies, as in physical ones, the remedy may be found in a poison. So she replied with a yearning to give consolation, "But we are not going to lose sight of one another altogether. I shall write to you, and you will answer my letters, and whatever progress you tell me you have made, I will mention to your good friend. Georgey's head drooped. The idea of absence so plainly stated was more than she could bear. "Now, dear love," went on Mrs. Lescrimière, "we must think of setting off: the days are short, and I do not like travelling in the dark."

"So soon?" cried Georgey, with a gasp.

"Courage, courage—come, begin your task of conquering self at once."

"I am so young,—only sixteen. I have been such a short time in the world, and it seems all over for me," said Georgey, with the piteous face of a sorrowful child.

"Very short time indeed, dear," said Mrs. Lescri-mière, soothingly; it was not the moment while the wound was yet green, to speak of the possibility of happiness. "You have been a very short time in the world and I have been a long time, yet I never knew but that doing what was right, brought peace."

Georgey did not hear the old lady's words. "He is just come into the porch," she said, her eyes with eager pleading in them fixed on Mrs. Lescri-mière.

"You would like to bid him good-by, Georgey?" The girl nodded. "Well, make haste and put on your dress."

Georgey stared—the few days she had been up, she had lain on the sofa in a dressing-gown and covered with shawls. Now, one of Maud's dresses had been shortened for her to wear during her journey.

"No, no, no—not dressed as a girl, let him come and say good-by, so," and she shrunk down among her heap of wraps. "Pray do, I want just to say thank you. You know you said yourself he had been kind to me. I'll go away quite quietly afterwards."

"Very well, so be it," said Mrs. Lescri-mière; she could not resist the anguish of the girl's look and voice.

When Escott was told of Georgey's request, he said,—“I have a horror of leave-takings and scenes.”

"Don't refuse, Walter," said Maud.

"Will you come with me?" he asked.

"I will be your chaperone," said Mrs. Lescri-mière. "Come, it will only be a disagreeable five minutes, and it will rid the child of the idea that you are angry with her."

As they were going upstairs, Escott said, "And what am I to call her, Miss George or Miss Brown?"

"You need not call her by any name," replied Mrs. Lescrimière; "the least said will be best. Tell her you will not forget her and that you hope to hear good news, shake hands and be off."

Nothing but Georgey's head was visible when Escott went up to the sofa. "I am come to wish you good-by and a pleasant journey," he said.

She looked up quickly at him. She did not know all that her eyes revealed. She did not speak.

"Mrs. Lescrimière has warned me that we are only to exchange farewells," went on Escott, his heart as well as voice involuntarily softening at the sight of the small pale face upturned to him. "We shall often have good accounts of you, I hope. I dare say some of your friends here will send you in return a history of what's going on in the parish. I am sure you will always care to hear about Eden."

Georgey tried to smile. Ah! whoever has seen such a spasm of pain on a human countenance will understand what sent Mrs. Lescrimière to the window.

"Good-by, George," said Escott, moved, and in the hurry of new-born pity, using the familiar name as he held out his hand.

Georgey could hardly raise hers, it felt as heavy as lead, making a supreme effort she dropped it into his.

"Good-by, George."

Her eyes on him always, but no word; he turned to look at her again as he reached the door, always her eyes on him—he bowed his head.

"A gasp from Georgey told Mrs. Lescrimière that

Escott was gone—she drew the girl's head to her bosom. "It's all dark," muttered Georgey, "dark, I can't see."

An hour after, the brougham was at the door, Georgey already in it, Mrs. Lescrimière's foot on the step, when Charlie, hot and breathless, rushed in at the gate.

"Stop, grandmamma!" he whispered to her, "the policeman is waiting just opposite the school-house. I'm sure it is for Georgey."

"Ay, indeed," said Mrs. Lescrimière, "well, we must take the top road," and then to the coachman, "go by the common, Thomas, and as quickly as you can." Thomas understood, and made the old horse step out his best. Thus mother and daughter at last escaped unmolested.

On that evening Mr. Greatorrex wound up his day's conversation by exclaiming, "Well, who would ever have dreamed of Eden being the scene of such adventures?"

And his wife observed, "You see, mother, that, after all, I was right in my reluctance to make the acquaintance of the Browns."

The case *was* very much against Mrs. Lescrimière, and the rector felt for her; but she was not beaten yet, she answered, "No, my dear, never repent of a kind action, however it turns out for yourself—never, under any circumstances, repent of having shown kindness to those more sinned against than sinning. Besides, who can say how much the unexpected

sympathy and fellowship of the good may do for people on the 'Edge of Dark,' as these unlucky Browns were? Think how Escott has brought that poor little half-cracked lamb Georgey into the fold. No, no, never regret having done a kind action."

The old lady had said this with her usual spirit until she spoke of Georgey—the thought of the poor heart-sore thing, made her eyes fill; but she brisked up again and added, "I am rather of that Irishman's way of thinking, who said, 'What's the use of standing up for a man when he's in the right—it's when he's wrong he needs you.'" This sally made every one laugh. Even Escott, had he thought her wrong, which he was not sure that he did, had no heart to argue with the kind woman. So once again grandmamma got the best of it in a skirmish.

Though a fever of excitement continued to burn from the nursery down to the kitchen, it was nevertheless a dull Christmas at the rectory. There was no Twelfth Night party, for Mrs. Greatorrex dreaded being catechized about the Browns, and then dear Carry was in no mood for fun.

One evening, it might be a week or ten days after the Epiphany, Mrs. Lescrimière sitting at her own side of the fire, woke Mr. Greatorrex out of a pleasant nap, and startled the children into silence by a vehement, "I thought it would be so," accompanied by a noise very like the stamp of a foot.

"What's the matter?" asked the drowsy rector.

"That man has actually escaped!" and Mrs. Lescrimière significantly tapped her newspaper.

Mr. Greatorrex, aware that his mother-in-law had

been watching for the Bouverie trial, guessed at once to whom she alluded, and exclaimed,

“What? Mr. Bouverie ran away?”

“No, *worse*, the prosecution is dropped, the laws of England seem to me an ingenious contrivance for the escape of criminals. It’s a wonder how any one is ever convicted in this country. All I have to say is, he would not have been allowed to escape scot free in France.”

“English laws, my dear madam,” said the rector, “are framed rather for the protection of the innocent, than for the condemnation of the guilty.”

“I am sure I am more thankful than I can say that Mrs. Brown’s story is not to go the round of the papers,” here put in Mrs. Greatorex, adding quickly, with a sly glance at her mother, “it’s a comfort to think that poor Mrs. Brown may now go where she likes without fear of the police.”

“True, but the guilty has triumphed,” retorted Mrs. Lescrimière.

No one took up the gage of battle.

At evening prayers the Rector read the thirty-seventh Psalm, all of it most emphatically, but laying a still stronger emphasis on the seventh and eighth verses, and also on the following words, “*I myself have seen the ungodly in great power and flourishing like a green bay-tree. I went by and lo! he was gone: I sought him, but his place could nowhere be found.*”

POST SCRIPTUM.

QUID DATUR À DIVIS FELICI OPTATIUS HORÂ ?

THE soldier falls, his place is filled at once, no gap is seen in the line. The vessel cleaves asunder the waves for a few seconds; it passes, and the water flows on evenly as before. Separations occur, no break in our life appears; stringent is the law which ordains that all emotions shall be transient, that only a short space shall be allotted to remembrance.

Spring had returned, the crisp ground had grown yielding, the earth made all the brighter by the stern rule of winter. See here a bud, and there a bud, and now there are too many on the little ruby-coloured twigs for us to count—and hark, the first hoarse, unpractised notes of birds, mingle with the lusty cry of the ploughman to his horses. Escott and Maud hold many a consultation in the garden, and presently they go to the copses and dingles to see the greatest show of primroses ever seen: and after the primroses come the wood anemonies and the delicate wood sorrel and the wonderfully blue hyacinths. Now, an exclamation of delight, now a silence—and then broken talk containing more eloquence and a great deal more to the point, than most of the speeches of the Parliament then sitting.

Green lanes are great promoters of confidence, and Maud yielding to their influence was gradually enlightening Escott as to her doubts and fears during the last year. Was she silly to let him thus see her

innermost feelings? The result was very agreeable at the moment : for he used the weapons she placed in his power with chivalrous generosity.

One day, it was in the leafy month of June, she assured him he would find her a poor companion. "Every day, Walter," says she, "I am more and more shocked by my deficiencies." He begged her not to distrust his judgment as to what he himself preferred. Escott was leagues away from guessing to what point Maud was travelling.

"I have just finished the *Life of Schiller*," she continued; "how clever all the women were that he knew. I seem scarcely to belong to the same species," and Maud sighed, and then blushed as she added, with a certain inward trepidation, "I never saw any one like those descriptions but Mrs. Brown."

Hitherto, as if by some agreement, all mention of the Browns had been avoided between the betrothed pair—yet Maud, though declaring to herself she had not the tiniest shred of jealousy of Mrs. Brown remaining in her possession, had all along had an almost uncontrollable desire to come upon the tacitly tabooed topic, with Escott. The name had come out with a jerk, and now she wished it unspoken. She was frightened lest Escott should guess what had given rise to those doubts and fears he had been just now so tenderly chiding as over humility; she fancied he must be able to read her folly in her face, and she nervously turned from him, burying the sharp end of her parasol in a tuft of speedwell, as if anxious for nothing else but to dig it up.

"Poor Mrs. Brown!" said Escott, breaking the

silence, "I did not imagine any one could feel envy of her."

"Not envy, oh, no! not envy, only one would like to be able to speak all those foreign languages and talk on subjects,—sensible subjects, as she did."

"Why, my dear Maud, if at nineteen you had all the acquirements and experience of Mrs. Brown, you would be a dreadful little alarming prodigy."

"But you liked to talk to Mrs. Brown."

"So I do sometimes to your grandmother, and Maud, dear, if you can't be as satisfied as I am with yourself as you are, I would rather you resembled your grandmother than Mrs. Brown."

"Oh! Walter, I am so glad you do admire grand-mamma at last; it makes me quite happy to hear you speak so of her."

Escott stopped and gathered the poor speedwell she had so ruthlessly attacked. As he gave it to her, he took both her hands in his, and said, gravely and gently, "From the day I asked you to be my wife, I have felt it to be for life or death between us. Do you understand me, Maud?"

A shy and contrite "Yes," was the answer.

And what had become of the Browns? Mrs. Lescririère had not left them unaided. Intimately acquainted with the Pastor of Kaiserswerth, she had obtained for the poor hunted-down creatures a peaceful asylum in the institution he had founded. They were going through the training that was to fit them for the service of the sick and poor. Mrs. Brown had renounced all intercourse with the world beyond the precincts of Kaiserswerth, except in her

calling as a sick nurse. Georgey was Mrs. Lescrimière's correspondent; she wrote frankly of her own struggles to do right, and to remain firm to her good resolutions; the letters were very touching and beautiful in their truthfulness. Mrs. Lescrimière, however, only showed them to Mrs. Greatorex; and the two ladies agreed that all that was necessary to tell the rest of the family was, that Georgey was going on as well as could be wished.

It was in July that Mrs. Lescrimière wrote to inform Georgey of Maud's approaching marriage. In her answer Georgey begged to be told the day fixed for the wedding. Mr. — had promised her that the blue flag of Kaiserswerth (the sign of a festival) should be hoisted in honour of the event. It was a simple little note, which could be shown to the bride and bridegroom elect—it ended, "Pray, dear madame, thank everybody for the good they have done me. When I read of the blessings that God gives to those who have been kind to the unfortunate, I always say over to myself all your names."

Maud had received the very proof her girlish heart had fixed on as the touchstone of Escott's love. He had urged that, parsonage or no parsonage, they should be married without further waiting.

"We shall have enough for bread-and-butter," said Mr. Escott, "and I assure you, Mrs. Slater does not cook ill—it's not an ugly place, is it Maud? In summer, the pond beneath the elms, and the cows looking at themselves in it, is a pretty pastoral scene."

"And give up your fellowship before you have a living? Oh, Walter, that is impossible."

"You are very prudent," Maud, he said, half crossly.

Wasn't this a delightful accusation from him? No coaxing could have been so charming as that crossness.

Mrs. Greatorrex listened to Escott's proposition outwardly, with appalling gravity; inwardly, she was charmed that her son-in-law had lost his reason. Mr. Greatorrex laughed and pooh-poohed the notion.

Interest was made in the right quarter; even heads of colleges and stern university committees, lose some of their stoicism to mundane delights, when the dilemma of a young couple wishing to be married, and having nothing to marry on, is properly brought before their notice and properly backed. Escott was presented to a living on which he ran no risk of starving a family.

Maud was married on a bright August day—it was a very pretty wedding. Garlands in the church, flowers on the path thither. As the newly-wedded pair drove along the road skirting the rectory garden, on the way to their new home, Maud almost blinded by the natural tears that filled her eyes, sat forward in the carriage to see all the old well-known sights. Caractacus, the roan pony, was standing in the glebe meadow surrounded by a host of poultry, intent on roosting, fleecy purple clouds were already gathering in the western sky, the light was behind the grey church, and the broad yews were nearly black. Suddenly some one whistled, and by an association of ideas bride and bridegroom remembered George Brown.

“Poor Georgey,” said Maud, and the unshed tears having got just the little provocation they needed, rolled rapidly over her rosy cheeks; a soft shower arising from all sweet womanly sympathies and emotions. Escott even, turned his head aside for an instant. The little trim figure once so familiar a daily object seemed to rise up before him.

“Poor George!” he repeated; adding, “It is very awful to see how the sins of the father darken the life of the child. But, Maud,” he went on, after a little thought, “why should we continue to call her ‘poor Georgey?’ she is doing well, *that* we know, and she is so young, that I dare to hope she may one day be as happy as we are. We must really break ourselves of the habit of calling her poor Georgey.”

THE END.

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